THE
APOCALY
OF
JESUS CH
A
REAPPEARANCE
I
JOHN
TO THE SEVEN
CHURCHES

WILLIAM J. McKNIGHT

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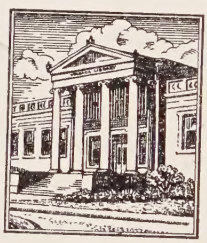

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THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

A REAPPEARANCE

THE APOCALYPSE OF JESUS CHRIST

A REAPPEARANCE

BEING THE FIRST OF FOUR COMPANION VOLUMES DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION OF "THE REVELATION" MADE TO THE APOSTLE JOHN ON THE ISLAND OF PATMOS—WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, LECTURES, BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INDEXES

I

JOHN TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

BY

WILLIAM J. McKNIGHT, D.D.

PASTOR OF THE FIRST REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
BOSTON

Ἀρχὴ ἥμισυ παντός—Aristotle

1927
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MAY 12 1930

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

who taught me the Scriptures, in word and meaning, by
precept and life, from the day I could first lisp the
Name that is above every name until the
day they were called, respectively, to
the other house
"not made with hands",

THIS BOOK
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

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185839

PREFACE

THE present is designed to be the first of four companion volumes on the Apocalypse. It consists of "Lectures" and "Prefatories". The Lectures have all been written; the subject has been thought through; but the Prefatories are not yet ready for the press. In a measure, however, the Seven Letters stand alone, and are capable of being treated in a book by themselves. They contain the vital historical facts out of which the rest of the Apocalypse grows. When their meaning is mastered the visions of the subsequent chapters unroll almost by obvious consequence. As Aristotle would say, it is a case where "the beginning is half of the whole". And since one never knows what a day may bring forth, or how soon the volume of life may be closed, I have thought it well to present as much of the work as has been finished to as many readers as may care to delve with me into one of the richest mines, as I regard it, that has ever offered itself to human exploration. Whether I have been able to unearth any new treasures of permanent value is left, of course, for others to say, but that the findings are different in numerous respects from other men's discoveries in the same field no reader, I presume, would be disposed to question.

The book is intended for whoever may have an inclination to read it. The Lectures are just plain everyday English that can be understood by anyone. Indeed, even

in the Prefatories there is but little that would not be perfectly intelligible to a layman, for almost invariably—there may be a few exceptions—the Greek is either translated, or the immediate context makes translation unnecessary. Not the professional scholar alone, accordingly, but anyone who is really interested in the revelation made to John on the Island of Patmos, will be able, I think, to follow these pages clear through to the end without being tantalized continually with things beyond his reach.

In the Prefatories an attempt is made to get back to the original sources, to deal with the text and other contemporary writings first-hand, and to make a study of these with the help of the light shed upon them by the labors of eminent scholars. It is not the aim in these chapters, however, to furnish the reader with a critical commentary—such, for example, as Swete's or Alford's or Meyer's—but simply to supply a substantial background for the views assumed or discussed in the respective Lectures. From the outset I determined not to know anything about the so-called "schools" of exegesis. The text lies before me as it lies, or has lain, before all others. What does it mean? All true interpretation depends on understanding the language of the text in the sense in which the original writer knew it would be understood, or at least meant that it should be understood, by the persons to whom the message was first addressed. Fortunately the history of the times to which the text belongs—thanks to Professor W. M. Ramsay and others in that field—has been raised from the dead, and made a living reality. If, then, I had been living in Ephesus in the year 100 A. D., with a thousand years of

that city's history throbbing through my veins,what would I have gathered from a letter addressed to me in terms like those contained in the letter to the Church of Ephesus? That is what I want to know. If I can ascertain that with any degree of exactitude, it will not be hard for me to apprise myself of the meaning of the message for the present hour, and for all time to come. Hence the object in the Prefatories has been to reproduce the historical setting in such a way as to disclose the fact that it called for the very words of the text. I dare not venture to think that so great an undertaking has been satisfactorily accomplished, but may perhaps be allowed to cherish the hope that enough has been done to stimulate other more competent minds to pursue the same course in a more excellent way.

In the Lectures the Prefatories are pieced together and unified with a view to presenting the theme in hand as a perfected structure. The Apocalypse, in one way or another, informs us on every page that God hates sin; that God loves purity and integrity; that to ally oneself with evil, to any extent whatsoever, is to fight against God; that to connect oneself with truth and rectitude, for Christ's sake, is to live under the sunlight of divine favor; that holiness in the character of God always implies both "goodness and severity"; that God expects the Christian to look upon worldliness and wrong-doing with instinctive abhorrence, and to align himself always and unequivocally on the side of righteousness; that Christ Jesus is a living, omniscient, omnipotent Person, whom God the Father has appointed to be the Judge of all the earth, and with whom, accordingly, man, as man, must inevitably reckon; and

that in touch with Him blessedness becomes a present and priceless possession of the soul, while apart from Him the horizon is black with tempests of wrath. Now, as Norton says, near the close of that great work of his on the *Genuineness of the Gospels*, "If there be a God in whose infinite goodness we and all beings are embosomed, if there be a future life which spreads before us, and all whom we love, exhaustless scenes of attainable happiness; if the Infinite Being, who so eludes the grasp of human thought, have really brought Himself into direct communication with mankind; if the character of Jesus Christ be not an inexplicable riddle, but a wonderful reality, these are truths of which a wise man may well desire fully to assure himself". The impressive thing in this connection is the remarkable way in which the history and circumstances of the seven cities to whose Churches John addressed the seven epistles assure us of these very truths, and furnish the canvas on which they are spread before the eye by the exquisite artistry of the Infinite Spirit. The Lectures aim to gather up what is said in the Prefatories so as to bring out the picture, as far as possible, in its fulness and entirety, and show that Christ expects Christians to conduct themselves like sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty.

Acknowledgments, due in all directions, will be found, where indebtedness is not self-evident, in the appropriate places. Of the *Commentaries* consulted, Swete's, to my mind, is easily the best. He writes, as he says in his Preface, under the persuasion that the Apocalypse offers "an unrivalled store of materials for Christian teaching, if only the book is approached with an assurance of its prophetic

character, chastened by a frank acceptance of the light which the growth of knowledge has cast and will continue to cast upon it"; to which he adds, "Here it may be briefly explained that I have sought to place each passage in the light of the conditions under which the book was composed, and to interpret accordingly; not forgetting, however, the power inherent in all true prophecy of fulfilling itself in circumstances remote from those which called it forth". Beckwith, too, is very helpful, and Milligan, in the *Expositor's*—not to mention others here.

Of another kind, but equally valuable, was the help I received from the Rev. Frank D. Frazer, of Portland, Oregon. During three or four years while these pages were in process of preparation he was waging a stubborn battle with death; and yet from his bed, by dictation when at length his hand was too feeble to hold a pen, he kept sending me criticisms and suggestions that were exceptionally keen and clear-visioned. From the very threshold of eternity, as it appeared to me then, his joyous unconquerable spirit never ceased to say to mine, "Work while it is day". Many a thread from his way of living and thinking has been woven into this fabric. Happily he won the battle; and it is largely through his urgency and help that the author is now submitting the present volume to the public.

One more must be named. The Rev. R. J. G. McKnight, Ph.D., D.D., Professor in charge of the Department of Hebrew and Greek Languages and Exegesis, in the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has been conducting his classes exegetically,

from time to time for a number of years, through the Apocalypse. For at least ten years we have been in constant touch with each other's thoughts and researches on the meaning of the Revelation. We have worked the material over together so often that our views are practically identical. Indeed, it would not have been amiss had his name appeared with mine on the title page.

Godet committed his classic *Commentary on the Gospel of John* to the public with the singularly felicitous prayer—"May all that which passed from the heart of Jesus into the heart and the writing of John communicate itself abundantly to my readers, so that the wish of the Holy Apostle may be accomplished in them: 'We write these things unto you, that your joy may be full'." If this book on the message of the Apocalypse to the Christian church could but have a similar effect, even though within a much smaller and less conspicuous circle, what a deep satisfaction would be mine!

Somerville, Massachusetts.
March first, 1927 W. J. McK.

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INTRODUCTION

THE exposition of the Letters to the Seven Churches herein offered to the reader proceeds on the assumption and deep-seated conviction that the Apocalypse was written by the Apostle John, in Asia Minor, during the latter part of the reign of Domitian. The historical evidence to this effect may be said to have found a notable place among those things which "cannot be shaken". Not that nothing may be said against such a position, for against it much has been said, and is still being said, and will doubtless continue to be said. Charles, for example, as lately as 1920, in *The International Critical Commentary*, would have us believe that the Apostle John never wrote anything, and that, "though Acts 12:2 fails us here", we are to accept as final the conclusion, refuted by the plainest contemporary historical statements, that "John the Apostle was never in Asia Minor, and that he died a martyr's death" as early perhaps as A. D. 64 and not later than A.D. 70. To traverse the ground once more and sift the evidence again would be a gratuitous task. It has been done so often and so well that little, if anything, remains to be added. Beckwith in 1919, to refer only to the recent, in his careful and judicious restatement of the case, anticipated Charles and answered his arguments before they were made. One wonders at times how Charles could ever persuade himself to build on his own contentions. Surely one ought to have something substantial to stand on when one proposes

to set aside the practically undisputed traditions of a whole millennium. The weight which Charles gives to the mental difficulties of Dionysius, coupled with the complacent disregard he shows of the latter's silence—where speech, if the facts had permitted, would have enabled this primitive father to make a real argument—is hardly what one would expect in such a thesaurus of learning. Hindu-like the Doctor places the world and the elephant on the back of the tortoise, and leaves the tortoise in the air, vainly feeling about for a foot-rest among the shades of Papias. But this, it seems to me, is not argument; is in fact, nothing more than an "insubstantial pageant faded". The historical evidence, when allowed to speak without hindrance, is unanimous in designating the Apostle John as the author of the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse. Not to mention others, the testimony of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who were in a position to know, is explicit. Marcus Dods, in his *Introduction to the Fourth Gospel*, expresses himself in language which is equally applicable to the Apocalypse, when he says: "John lived in the times of Trajan, whose reign began in A. D. 98, while Polycarp was born not later than A. D. 70, and was put to death in 156, so that the first thirty years of his life coincided with the last thirty years of John's, and the last thirty years with the youth of Irenaeus. This being so, can it fairly be said to be likely that after such intimacy with Polycarp as Irenaeus claims, he should not know whether John had written the Gospel or not? Is it conceivable that a young man of an intelligent and inquiring turn of mind should have been in daily communication

with a pupil of the Apostle's, and should never have discovered the origin of the most remarkable document of primitive Christianity?" As much also may be said of Justin Martyr, who was living in Ephesus in A. D. 135, and who was contemporaneous accordingly for a number of years with Papias and Polycarp and Irenaeus; for when Justin says, as he does in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, that "a certain man among us whose name was John, one of the Apostles of Christ, prophesied in a revelation made to him, that those who believe in our Christ would spend a thousand years in Jerusalem," he must assuredly have been fully persuaded in his own mind that the Apostle was the author of the Apocalypse. "Among us", of course, may mean merely *among Christians*, irrespective of time or place, but the plain pointed assertions of Irenaeus leave nothing indefinite. To my mind his precision is so marked and his statements presuppose such general acceptance, that we must either take him at his word, or else dispose of him as a witness altogether. "All the presbyters", says this friend of Polycarp, "who met with John, the disciple of the Lord, in Asia, give testimony that he conveyed to them these things; for he lived with them even to the time of Trajan". In another place: "Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on His breast, published the Gospel while he dwelt at Ephesus, in Asia". Again: "The Church of Ephesus, which was founded by Paul and in which John lived until the time of Trajan, is also a truthful witness of the tradition of the Apostles". Also: "This number" —666, which, of course, he gets from the Apocalypse— "is found in all the accurate and ancient manuscripts, and

is attested by all those who saw John face to face". What John? Some unknown, otherwise unheard of Palestinian Jew "who migrated late in life to Asia Minor"? Seriously? Furthermore and finally: "For it (the apocalyptic vision) was seen, not long ago, but almost in our generation, near the end of Domitian's reign".

Equally unequivocal also is the internal evidence. Into any date earlier than the reign of Domitian the seven letters cannot be made to fit. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians everywhere bears the marks of having been written to a people that had only but started on the Christian life. Emperor-worship, with its fatal implications, had not as yet asserted itself imperatively. In the Apocalypse, however, it is the determining touchstone of Christian character. The question of the hour was loyalty to Christ under the Empire. Would the believer say "Lord Caesar" and walk at liberty, or "Lord Jesus" and face a martyr's death? This is the omnipresent dilemma with which we are confronted in the seven letters. It did not exist in the days of Nero; it did exist in the days of Domitian. Domitian's officers, in issuing his mandates, were to do it in the name of "Our Lord and our God". He insisted that his subjects should regard him as God Incarnate, and worship him accordingly. With this historical setting as a background the Apocalypse becomes a luminous book. Statements and symbols otherwise meaningless thus become vivid. The Apocalypse affords us a mirror of the conflict at its crisis between 'the world-rulers of darkness' and the children of light. The hour at which it was written enfolded within itself, in epitome, every element of the

struggle between Christ and antichrist—a fact upon which the book lays vigorous hold, and which it crystallizes in magnificent fashion for the enlightenment of all subsequent ages. And the whole Christian world, it should here be said, is indebted beyond accounting to Sir William Ramsay, particularly in his *Letters to the Seven Churches*, for the contribution he has made toward a scientifically accurate understanding of the "sea of troubles" upon which the Apocalypse was launched. Under his hand the history of Asia Minor at the close of the first century fairly scintillates with interest and suggestiveness. He has made it practically impossible to think of the Apocalypse as belonging to any other era. Recent research therefore has only served to verify and reinforce the incidental observations of Irenaeus. External and internal evidence coincide and concur. So that, as Elliott says, in the Introduction to his *Horae Apocalypticae*, "The attempts that have been made to get rid of this testimony, and force another meaning on Irenaeus' words, by those whose Apocalyptic theories made them wish to do so, seem to me to have utterly failed. It is as clear a testimony on the point it relates to as can be found to any other fact in any other historian".

Then too, when the critics banish the Apostle John from Asia Minor and consign him to an early martyr's death in Palestine,

> "Another of his fathom they have none
> To lead their business".

The author of the Apocalypse, as we might say—

> "Knows almost every grain of Plutus' gold;
> Finds bottom in the uncomprehensive deeps;

Keeps pace with thought, and almost, like the gods,
Does thoughts unveil in their dumb cradles"—

and yet no one ever heard of him! The Apocalypse is one of the most marvellous productions that has ever issued from the mind of man; it was written by a man who had been exiled to the island of Patmos, off the coasts of Asia Minor; it blends with the events of Domitian's reign with divine exactitude; such men as Polycarp and Irenaeus were on the ground at the time—men to whom nothing whatsoever that pertained to the cause of Christ was indifferent; and yet some obscure Palestinian Jew, never heard of before nor since, imposed the Apocalypse upon them, and succeeded in convincing them that the Beloved Disciple, who had leaned on Jesus' breast in the Upper Room, had penned its pages, unparallelable of their kind in all the annals of time, and had lived in Ephesus until the reign of Trajan, while as a matter of fact, for more than a quarter of a century,

"Far hence he lies
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down"!

There are men to whom an insurmountable fact is but a trifling obstacle. John was equipped in every way to write the Apocalypse. No other man in that age, of whom we have any knowledge whatsoever, was. Surely the criticism that deprives us of John ought to supply us with some one else "of his fathom". Charles' wholly supposititious "Palestinian Jew", who never stepped forth from oblivion long enough to reveal his identity, is too sorry a substitute to answer the demands of the situation. *Ex nihilo nihil fit,*

but the Apocalypse is not *nihil.* It is an entity of stupendous proportions. It needs a cause adequate to the effect, an author competent to produce it. From what we know of John he could have done it. History, real history—for the manipulation of events to suit a theory is not history—says he did do it; "no other early tradition", says Moffatt, "has anything like the same support or plausibility". And, as Emerson says, "It makes a great difference to the force of any sentence whether there be a man behind it or no". History tells us that there was a man behind the Apocalypse, a well-known man, one of the greatest men this globe of ours has ever been honored with; criticism bids us content ourselves with a chimera.

> "Wrong ever builds on quicksands, but the Right
> To the firm centre lays its moveless base".

But if John lived at Ephesus until the beginning of Trajan's reign, it becomes difficult, we are told, to maintain that he was not the author of the Fourth Gospel, and two writings so widely different in style and character as the Gospel and the Apocalypse, we are futhermore assured, could never have been composed by the same person. This argument is as sadly overworked as the Hebrews were under the taskmasters of Egypt. Differences are exaggerated, or created out of nothing. The great undercurrent of similarity and agreement is ignored. Where is the author who does not adjust his style to the subject in hand, the purpose in view, and the readers whom he aims to influence? It is one of the commonest things in literature. Of course, it is to be admitted that there are diver-

gences at times which logic alone is unable to reconcile. Take the following, for example.

"And what is so rare as a day in June?
Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays;
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;
Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;
The flush of life may well be seen
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;
The cowslip startles in meadows green,
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice,
And there's never a leaf nor a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace".

"A masterpiece", you say. Nothing overdone. Nothing underdone. No needless words. No needed word omitted. Written by a finished scholar, a lover of nature, a real poet. Worthy, in fact, to be ranked as a classic. Now, compare such workmanship, if you will, with lines like these:

"Aprul's come back; the swellin' buds of oak
Dim the fur hillsides with a purplish smoke;
The brooks are loose an', singing to be seen,
(Like gals,) make all the hollers soft an' green;
The birds are here, for all the season's late;
They take the sun's height an' don' never wait;
Soon 'z he officially declares it's spring
Their light hearts lift 'em on a north'ard wing,
An' th' ain't an acre, fur ez you can hear,
Can't by the music tell the time o' year".

To be sure, it must be granted that this second excerpt is not without a certain beauty of its kind. If one were to take the pains to correct the spelling and grammaticize the writer's English, the thought itself would not be wholly unpoetical. Indeed, the themes of the two quotations are by no means dissimilar, have even been held by some—and not without reason—to be practically identical. If anything, the second excels the first in some respects. Compare, for example, four lines from the first with four lines (corrected of course) from the second.

"Every clod feels a stir of might,
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And, groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers".

"April's come back; the swelling buds of oak
Dim the far hillsides with a purplish smoke;
The brooks are loose and, singing to be seen,
(Like girls,) make all the hollows soft and green".

Which shall we prefer—the picture of the clod stirring with a hidden power, reaching, towering, "groping blindly above it for light", and finally climbing "to a soul" in the flowers of the field; or the picture of the hillsides far away in the dim distance turning purple with the swelling oak-buds, while from these same hillsides the brooks, let loose by the breath of Spring, come singing, like happy school-girls, into the green velvety valleys at our very feet? We feel in our heart of hearts, as we read, that the soul that produced the one could have produced the other. Obviously, however, such a view is wholly untenable. The vulgarisms of the second exhibit make it impossible for any

critic, who makes any pretensions whatever to scholarship and concern for the truth, to hold that the first exhibit, with its exquisite purity, could have proceeded from the same author. How could the writer of those former lines have ever tolerated such barbarisms as "Aprul", "gals", "hollers", "don' never", "soon 'z", and "aint"? It is simply out of the question. So much so, that the verdict against a common authorship may at length be said to have been established as one of the accepted results of modern scholarship. However, the opposing arguments, even though inconclusive, are somewhat forcible. For example, it is maintained by some that since the sentiment and the poetic genius and feeling and charm of the two are so nearly identical they may have been composed by the same author —the latter, while the author was a mere youth, living the life of a "rustic mountaineer", out on those 'far hillsides', among uncouth acquaintances who had never heard good English; the former, years afterward, when the poet perhaps had moved into a city and had come into touch with the disciplines, the urbanities and the culture of some great university. This contention, it is held, is favored, if not proved, by the occurrence of the word "meadows" in the former quotation, and (to refer to it in the proper form) the word "hollows" in the latter. Evidently this latter, if written by the same author, must have been written before the more mellow term "meadows", or even the word "valleys", had come into use. It is certainly remarkable, to say the least, that neither of the two words just mentioned finds a place in the more illiterate poem. It may be urged that meadows are not usually found on "hillsides",

but then, to offset this objection, there was that word "valleys", which, had it been current at the time, our author would presumably have used in preference to the unpardonable "hollers". If, therefore, it is to be conceded at all that both poems were penned by the same author, it is simply imperative to conclude that the second preceded the first by at least a quarter of a century. No lesser allowance will enable us to account for the disappearance of the barbarisms. Howbeit, when all is said, this argument, though valid and effective, and though it undoubtedly proves what the facts must have been if both fragments were written by the same author, falls fatally short when it is confronted by the extreme improbability that two poems, so markedly different, could have proceeded from the same mind. The verdict of the scholars, accordingly, is to be accepted, and the case is to be considered as closed. The fragments were written by different authors.

Is not this the line of reasoning, or something like the line of reasoning, we meet with almost every day in the field of criticism? And how plausible it is! And how learnedly it enables one to write! Here is a company of archaeologists, let us say, in the year 3927 A. D., excavating among the ruins of ancient Boston. Among their findings are the two aforesaid fragments. No names are attached, and no dates. Everything has to be conjectured. Is there one man in a thousand that would ascribe them to the same author? Would not something like the foregoing observations be perfectly natural? But let us suppose that a few years later the same excavators should hit upon a full set of James Russell Lowell's works. In *The Vision of Sir*

Launfal, written in 1848, they find the former fragment; in one of the *Biglow Papers*, dated April 5, 1866, they find the latter. Their new discovery, that is to say *history*, asserts that the two productions issued from the same mind, and furthermore, that the second, instead of antedating the first, followed in its wake by as many as eighteen years. Lowell wrote them both. He wrote the pure English first. Moreover, it was precisely because he could write the pure English that he could handle so masterfully the dialectical. Nor did he write the dialectical merely for pastime. He was actuated by a deep-laid purpose of a high order. "In choosing the Yankee dialect", he says, "I did not act without forethought. It had long seemed to me that the great vice of American writing and speaking was a studied want of simplicity, that we were in danger of coming to look on our mother tongue as a dead language, to be sought in the grammar and dictionary rather than in the heart, and that our only chance of escape was by seeking it at its living sources among those who were, as Scottowe says of Major-General Gibbons, 'divinely illiterate'." Every word was weighed, every syllable, every letter. Mark what he says himself: "At the same time, by studying uniformity I have sometimes been obliged to sacrifice minute exactness. The emphasis often modifies the habitual sound. For example, *for* is commonly *fer* (a shorter sound than *fur* for *far*), but when emphatic it always becomes *for*, as 'wut *for!*' So *too* is pronounced like *to* (as it was anciently spelt), and *to* like *ta* (the sound as in the *tou* of *touch*), but *too*, when emphatic, changes into *tue*, and *to*, sometimes, in similar cases, into *toe*, as, 'I did n' hardly

know wut *toe* du'!" And yet again, for in quoting Lowell one hardly knows how to quit, and especially when the parallelism becomes the more increasingly evident the further one goes: "To me the dialect was native, [as the Hebrew and Aramaic were to John], was spoken all about me when a boy, at a time when an Irish day-laborer was as rare as an American one now. Since then I have made a study of it so far as opportunity allowed. But when I write in it, it is as in a mother tongue, and I am carried back far beyond any studies of it to long-ago noonings in my father's hay-fields, and to the talk of Sam and Job over their jug of *blackstrap* under the shadow of the ash-tree which still dapples the grass whence they have been gone so long".

Here, then, is a great American author, who is solicitous about his "mother tongue", afraid that it may come to be regarded as "a dead language", and who decides accordingly to reinvigorate both "grammar and dictionary" by resorting to "the heart", and thus coming into touch with the science of expression at "its living sources" among the "divinely illiterate". He explicitly admits that for the sake of "uniformity" he has "sometimes been obliged *to sacrifice minute exactness*". He also informs us that while he had made the whole matter a subject of study "as opportunity allowed", it was not this after all, but his early associations, that qualified him for the task: for to him "the dialect was native", so that when he wrote he was "carried back far beyond any studies" to the days when as a boy he had lain under the shadows of the ash-tree and listened to the talk of the hired hands on his father's farm.

With these modern *historical facts* in mind let us now cull a page or so from the introductory remarks of eminent scholars. Moses Stuart: "The older critics who have found fault with the idiom of the Apocalypse, have, for the most part, contented themselves with pointing out the differences between ordinary prosaic Greek and that of the Revelation. It requires, indeed, but a moderate share of acquaintance with the usual classic Greek in order to be able to point out what have been named (after the example of Dionysius), *barbarisms* and *solecisms* in the Apocalypse. Even a tyro who has but learned the ordinary rules of syntax can do this; for departures from these are of frequent occurrence in the Revelation. A more advanced state of acquaintance with Greek, however, must lead one to conclude that there are few, if any, of the apparent anomalies in the Revelation which may not be justified by examples of the like kind, even among the more reputable Greek authors". Randell, in the *Pulpit Commentary:* "The writer gives ample proof that he was acquainted with the rules and even the subtleties of Greek grammar: yet he departs from those rules and neglects those subtleties with such apparent carelessness that he has been accused of the grossest ignorance of the Greek language. But to students acquainted with Hebrew, the style of the Apocalyptic Greek presents very little difficulty, and its so-called roughnesses occasion little surprise". Beckwith: "The departures from correct grammatical usage are not due to ignorance; the writer shows a knowledge and command of Greek too accurate to make such a supposition tenable. Beyond a question both books (the Gospel and Apocalypse)

come from writers, or a writer, whose mode of thought and native speech are Hebraic; and that this Hebraic manner is followed more closely in one book than in the other may conceivably be due to causes other than duality of authorship. The whole character of an apocalypse, a type of writing Jewish in origin, contents and manner, would lead us to expect a more Hebraic style in the Revelation than in the Fourth Gospel, which is a theological interpretation of the incarnate life of Christ. Moreover as the Apocalyptist in the selection and arrangement of his matter shows careful observance of a fixed plan, a studied handling of his subject with reference to the production of a drama of visions, so he may be conceived to have adopted, perhaps half unconsciously, a diction and manner which he felt to be more consonant with the utterances of a prophet and ecstatic". Swete: "His (the author's) eccentricities of syntax are probably due to more than one cause: some to the habit which he may have retained from early years of thinking in a Semitic language; some to the desire of giving movement and vivid reality to his visions, which leads him to report them after the manner of shorthand notes, jotted down at the time; some to the circumstances in which the book was written. But from whatever cause or concurrence of causes, it cannot be denied that the Apocalypse of John stands alone among Greek literary writings in its disregard of the ordinary rules of syntax, and the success with which syntax is set aside without loss of perspicuity or even of literary power. The book seems openly and deliberately to defy the grammarian, and yet even as literature, it is in its own field unsurpassed". Charles: "The Apocalypse is

notable for the clearness, simplicity, and uniformity of its phrasing. When once our author has adopted a certain combination of words he holds fast to it as a general rule. This is an essential characteristic of his style. There is rarely any variation in the words or in their arrangement. . . . And yet notwithstanding this absolute simplicity and apparent monotony, there is no sublimer work in the whole Bible".

It is generally agreed, therefore,—for on this point opinion is practically unanimous,—that the Greek of the Apocalypse is more or less deeply tinged, and not a little enlivened, with Hebraisms. It is written in what might be called a moderately Hebraistic dialect. Consequently from a Greek point of view, like Lowell's Yankee dialect from an English point of view, it exhibits many "barbarisms" and solecisms" and "eccentricities of syntax". Yet with all this "the writer gives ample proof that he was acquainted with the rules and even the subtleties of Greek grammar". His "departures from correct grammatical usage are not due to ignorance". So patent is this fact that for students who have any really "advanced state of acquaintance with Greek", and who are at the same time "acquainted with Hebrew", the "so-called roughnesses occasion little surprise". Moreover, the style of writing, while it unfailingly evinces "forethought", and everywhere bears the marks of having adjusted itself to the "careful observance of a fixed plan" and the "studied handling" of the subject with a view to a definite purpose, evidently has its source in deeper soil. Manifestly the writer has been "carried back far beyond any studies" of linguistic forms

and grammatical constructions to an innate aptitude "retained from early years of thinking in a Semitic language". Instinctively his words take a certain delicate coloring from those youthful days when he used to survey the skies, and study the clouds, and mark the winds, and listen to the thunders, and watch the lightnings, and gaze upon storm-tossed waters or behold a new heaven and a new earth reflected in a "sea of glass", from the shores of Gennesaret. In short, the Apocalypse is just such a book as the Apostle John was qualified to write; history says he wrote it; it suits the moment that history allots to it; seeming difficulties, when patiently scrutinized, not merely dissolve, but turn out to be but incidental and natural verifications of the early tradition; we have a modern illustration which, if pushed back into the same era and sheared of all but the same or similar elements, would infallibly yield the "accepted results" of recent criticism, but *would be contrary to fact*; what more do we need?

And yet there is one other aspect of the matter which should perhaps be noted. Dr. Charles maintains that the author of the Fourth Gospel "shows a subtle discrimination in availing himself of the manifold variations of order which are possible in Greek expressing various subtle shades of meaning", and that in "so far as the outward form goes" the style of the Apocalypse is "essentially monotonous" when compared with the style of the Gospel. Precisely. The Gospel has to do with the delineation of a character infinitely rich in its many-sidedness, the character of the only begotten Son of God, "full of grace and truth" —a task to the accomplishment of which what language

could ever prove to be adequate? What wonder then if the author of the Gospel should tax the Greek to the uttermost limits of its capacity for "manifold variations" under such conditions? It is exactly what one should expect. The theme demanded it. With the Apocalypse, however, the case was different. At bottom, the Apocalypse is dealing with great moral principles which are one and the same "yesterday, today and for ever". Once stated correctly they are always stated correctly. There is little or no call for variation. Is it strange that the author of this book, than which "there is no sublimer work in the whole Bible", should have been competent to grasp this fact, and to write accordingly? What we have in both Gospel and Apocalypse is simply an author who comprehends his subject and knows how to handle it.

The object, or at least one of the principal objects, which John had in view was to impress the reader with the need of measuring up to the divine ideal for Christian living. Throughout the Apocalypse this purpose is never lost sight of. Men had at their service the Old Testament, long ago a completed book. Redemption had become an actuality in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and in the descent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. With the issuance of the Apocalypse the New Testament would be rounded out. All things were now ready. The time was at hand for a new start in the world's history. With what, from this time forth, would God be satisfied? With half-and-half men? With men who might be able to content themselves with some imagined golden mean between right and wrong? With Nicolaitans, or Jezebelites,

or Laodiceans? With whom would God be well pleased? The Bible knows but one standard for human conduct. Through Moses, from the very first, God had given Israel the commandment,"Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy". In the Psalms the "beauty of holiness" becomes the song of the heart. The New Testament in manifold ways elaborates the requirement, leaves no angle of it untouched, and insists that nothing but godliness is profitable, either for this life or for the life to come. How fervently, for example, Paul wrestled at a throne of grace for the Thessalonians, that they might be sanctified" wholly" —that is to say, in everything they aimed at—and might be preserved blameless in every part and particle, power and aptitude, of the body, in every activity and capability of the soul, and in every conceivable aspect of the spirit. The key word here (I Thess. 5:23) is ὁλόκληρος, (**completely in every part or function**); it leaves nothing unincluded. In writing to Timothy, however, Paul develops this ground-thought still further. Timothy, who day by day is being sanctified wholly, in everything he aims at, and whose life, completely in every part and function of his personality, is being preserved blameless, is not to rest satisfied with that: he must become an **artist** (ἄρτιος), trained for the accomplishment of every kind of good work that may fall within the circumference of an ideal Christian life. How many men and women there are, musicians at heart, with the thumbs and fingers of both hands perfectly developed, who yet are incapable of bringing melody out of a piano. The divine standard is that every Christian on earth shall be an "artist" in every good work under the sun (II Tim.

3:17). But even an artist may debase his art and dissipate his energies. Consequently, as though to preclude such a possibility and gather the whole conception of the divine ideal within the compass of a single word, Christ says (Matt. 5:48), "Be ye therefore **perfect** (τέλειος), even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect". The Father has His whole sublime **"end and aim"** before His mind all the time, and makes everything He does or permits to be done contribute to its ultimate fulfilment; the Christian must do no less. "Ye shall be perfect", says Christ, in the same way. Sanctified in every part, doing the work of the kingdom with the skill of an artist, making every stroke tell toward the realization of the heavenly Father's will—how would it be possible to set before men a higher ideal?

It is this ideal that pervades the Apocalypse. In one phase or another it radiates from every paragraph. John starts with it, as it were, at the bottom, in a piece of history. The situation at Ephesus sets before us in miniature the contract of the Christian church in the world. Outwardly everything was perfect. The members there were 'toiling' prodigiously; their steadfast 'endurance' was phenomenal; their abhorrence of evil men was wholesome and unequivocal; their zeal for the purity of the church was timely and commended by Christ; it was impossible to make them acknowledge for a moment that they were 'weary'; and yet they were in danger of being moved back, altogether out of touch with the great work of evangelizing the world. Now what was the matter? Just this, and nothing else than this—away down in the depths of the heart, in the region of moral motives, they had, to some extent, fallen away

from the divine ideal of working solely for the honor of Christ. That sin, though wholly invisible, in its origin at least, to the human eye, and wholly undiscoverable by any human means or ingenuity, had death in it. It would keep a man from being held aloft in the right hand of Christ as a 'star' in the firmament of grace. God demands the best, and nothing but the best; and the best all the time. The standard of character is "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ". For men who live on such a plane the whole world changes its aspect. They dwell under a new heaven and on a new earth. In their thought and experience the "holy city" becomes incorporate. And as "the city lieth foursquare", so they face the powers of darkness on all sides. Their souls are fed from the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, from the throne of God and the Lamb. They are like trees "planted by the rivers of water"; they bring forth their fruit in the appointed season; their leaf never withers; whatsoever they do prospers. They carry in their lives the healing ingredient for all nations. Collectively they are entitled to be thought of as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife". Ruled by their supreme ideal to see Christ as He is, and to be "like Him", they even take their stand side by side with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit says "Come", and the Bride says "Come". Their lives become a standing invitation to the whole world lying in sin.

Thus character at its perfectest is the theme of the Apocalypse. If the "beauty of holiness" keeps pace with the years, the life will tell for righteousness, will be permeated with unceasing blessedness, will ascribe every conceivable

excellency to the name of the Redeemer, and will make itself ready for the full enjoyment of an immaculate eternity.

The reverse side of the picture is presented with equal vividness. The invisible and seemingly infinitesimal breaking away at Ephesus involves within it sure and fatal disaster. The compromising spirit of the Nicolaitans and the Jezebelites gives the reins into the hands of Satan. The slightest departure from the ideal standard lets loose the forces of evil to the uttermost "corners of the earth". Even "Gog and Magog", at the farthest remove from the centres of civilization, so indistinct in the distance as to escape being reckoned with, experience a new lease of life in their maleficent designs every time a follower of Christ, howsoever humble a place he may occupy in the kingdom, fails to meet the demands of the hour, and falls short of doing what his Lord expects of him. The Christian is responsible for the abolition of wickedness. For him accordingly no variation from the law of rectitude is permissible. Negligence or half-heartedness enlists him, in so far forth, on the side of Apollyon. When Satan through the vacillation and falling away of such as call themselves Christians gains a temporary ascendancy, war follows; and with it all kinds of wretchedness and suffering, filling the earth with dead bodies, robbing all the world of happiness —all the world except the buzzards and the vultures, which gather in glee to eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and their riders, even the flesh of all alike, both free and bond, both small and great. And so the struggle goes on perennially between right and wrong. In the end right-

eousness always wins the day, evil is always worsted; yet the conflict never dies down; as long as man is man it cannot.

"This battle fares like to the morning's war,
When dying clouds contend with growing light;
What time the shepherd, blowing of his nails,
Can neither call it perfect day, nor night.
Now sways it this way, like a mighty sea,
Forc'd by the tide to combat with the wind;
Now sways it that way, like the selfsame sea
Forc'd to retire by fury of the wind;
Sometime, the flood prevails; and then, the wind;
Now, one the better; then, another best;
Both tugging to be victors."

What a pity that so many myriads, who have sworn allegiance to the crucified Redeemer in "this fell war", have been contented to rest at ease while the battle rages, and have shown themselves ready to say, with the effeminate king—

"Here, on this molehill, will I sit me down.
To whom God will, there be the victory"!

The Apocalypse portrays the value of an unimpeachable character and a spotless life in the forwarding of Christ's kingdom. It depicts as no other book has ever done the consequences of doing right and doing wrong. It teaches what no conscience has ever been able successfully to trifle with—namely, that "there is no time so miserable, but a man may be true". To this end it sets out from plain historical facts, familiar to everyone at the time, consisting in conditions, incidents, experiences, modes of behavior, attitudes of mind, that had come under the eye and the analysis of the Apostle John, during his residence in Ephesus,

and while he was laboring among the Churches of Asia Minor. From the beginning to the end everything moves with the exactness of science, and yet we climb or soar from height to height as in a dream. More and more as we ascend a feeling takes possession of us that no other than he who had leaned on the Lord Christ's bosom in the Upper Room could have seen as this writer sees, or could have spoken as he speaks. As the panorama unfolds and approaches the last resplendence of its ineffable ending, the Beloved Disciple, now as the Apostle of Love, now as the Son of Thunder, seems to me to say to every heart that accords the authorship to him—

> "Thou know'st no less but all: I have unclasp'd
> To thee the book even of my secret soul".

CHAPTER I

PREFATORY TO LECTURE I

1. Ἀποκάλυψις, (**apocalypse**) is susceptible of two interpretations: it may mean an unveiling of some plan that has been kept in concealment, a disclosure made for the purpose of imparting information—a *revelation;* or it may mean simply the lifting of a curtain to let some thing or some person be seen—a *manifestation*, an *appearance.* In spite of the preponderance of opinion in favor of the former meaning in this connection, the latter would seem to be, on the whole, the more defensible. For one thing, the word itself is neutral. It bears the second signification in the New Testament, as well as the first, repeatedly. We read, *e.g.*, of what will happen "at the **revelation**" (ἀποκαλύψει)—the appearance of "the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of His power in flaming fire" (II Thess. 1:7); and of the Corinthians, "waiting for the **revelation**" (ἀποκάλυψιν)—the appearance "of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:7); where the word means either the *visible manifestation* of Christ's power in the world, much as the growing grass in the springtime *manifests* the vital energy of the sun, or else the *actual appearance* of Christ in the Judgment. To the same effect cf. I Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13. There is nothing therefore in the New Testament usage of the word to prevent its being rendered in English by *appearance*, or, here, *reappearance.*

Again, it should be noted that the thing in itself was not uncommon. It had already happened frequently. Within

the "forty days" after the resurrection Jesus had "appeared" on various occasions, until upward of five hundred persons had seen Him (I Cor. 15:6). Then, after His ascension, He appeared to Stephen (Acts 7:55, 56). The real parallel here, however, is found in the life of Paul. He later, precisely as John here, enjoyed an ἀποκάλυψιν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Gal. 1:12). If it is insisted that in this instance the word means "revelation", it may also be insisted, and with equal reason, that it posits an "appearance" within the duration of which the "revelation" was received. That our Lord "*appeared*" to Paul is asserted more than once. "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord" (I Cor. 9:1)? "And while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance, and saw Him" (Acts 22:17, 18). "And last of all, as to the child untimely born, He appeared to me also" (I Cor. 15:8). Cf. also what Ananias says: "The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth. For thou shalt be a witness for Him unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:14, 15). Paul's message was to be first-hand. As a "witness" he must be able to say, I have "seen and heard". So with John, in the present undertaking. The similarity of these two men's experience is obvious. As Christ had appeared to Paul He appeared to John, and for virtually the same purpose. John, in fact, though he did not understand it at the time, had been notified to expect just such an "appearance" as this proved to be. To Peter, concerning John, Jesus said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee" (John 21: 22, 23)? And John 'tarried',

tarried sixty years, and Jesus 'came'. And when He came, John saw Him, heard His voice, and felt the touch of His hand. "And I turned to see, . . . and having turned I saw . . . one like unto a son of man. . . . And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; . . . write . . . the things which thou sawest" (Rev. 1;12, 13, 17, 19). John's message, like Paul's, was to be first-hand. Accordingly, the "Faithful Witness" favored him with an "appearance", or as it was in his case, with a "reappearance". As much as this, at least, is a matter of fact.

The main objection to the word "appearance", as a translation of ἀποκάλυψις, lies in ἔδωκεν (**gave**). But δίδωμι is a word of considerable elasticity. Moreover, this elasticity has to be drawn upon equally in either case. To speak of a "revelation"—meaning by that an "unveiling" of plans hitherto kept in concealment, and consequently the imparting of a new stock of information—to speak of a revelation of such a kind as being "given" to Christ, given, that is, in the sense that the disclosure was news to Him, is precarious, if not intolerable, no matter how skilfully ordered the wording may be. The passages cited in support of this view are beside the mark, for where they do not suggest precisely the contrary (*e.g.*, Matt. 11:27), they refer solely to our Lord's life in the flesh. Take Alford's comment: "The man Christ Jesus, even in His glorified state, receives from the Father, by His hypostatic union with Him, that revelation which, by His Spirit, He imparts to His church. For, (Acts 1:7), the

times and seasons are kept by the Father in His own power; and of the day and the hour knoweth no man, not the angels in heaven, nor even the Son, but the Father only (Mark 13:32)." But in Mark 13:32 Christ is evidently speaking of His earthly life only; whereas in Acts 1:7, where He speaks in the glorified body of His resurrection, the former reference, as touching the limitation of His knowledge, is conspicuously absent. Indeed, there is no intimation anywhere that our ascended Lord is, or since His ascension ever has been, anything but omniscient in every respect. He is not to be thought of for a moment, after His entrance into glory, as standing in need of new portfolios from time to time, even from the Father. Of those who hold that the word means a "revelation", or new stock of information, imparted to Christ, the statement in *Meyer* is among the best: "The revelation described in this book, Christ received from the Father, not in the flesh, but when exalted and glorified, the perpetual Mediator between God and man, in order to communicate it by His testimony to the prophetic seer, and thus besides to all His servants". At bottom, however, this statement is inadmissible. At His ascension the Lord Christ simply stepped back into what was His own. He reassumed what He had laid aside. What had been His in eternity came to be His again *by virtue of* that reassumption, *without any "revelation"*. But even had there been a "revelation" at the time of the ascension, it would be improper to compress the purpose of it into the area of the purpose assigned here. Surely Christ, on entering into glory, did not reassume His position of equality with the Father,

and His omniscience, solely with a view of "showing" John, and through him the church, what was about to happen in the world. Even conceding the admissibility of the view in itself, therefore, the setting is not congenial to the thought that the Father, at the moment contemplated in the context, made new disclosures to the Son. Stern's questions, quoted by Alford, are really what have to be answered—"How are we to understand this? Is not Christ very God, of one essence with the Father from eternity? Did He not, by virtue of the omniscence of His divine nature, know as exactly as the Father, what should be the process of the world's history, what the fate of the church? What purpose was served by a revelation from God to Jesus?"

If then we are to cling to the word "revelation" as the proper translation of ἀποκάλυψις, we must approach it from a different angle. We must think of it not as a revelation made by the Father to the Son, but as a revelation made by the Father and the Son conjointly to the church. The meaning then would be that what the Son *had already revealed* to John, when this writing would first be read, was not something which the Son had taken in hand independently, but something, on the contrary, which the Father "had" antecedently "commissioned" Him to reveal. (For the English pluperfect as a rendering in such an instance, see, *e.g.*, Burton's *N. T. Moods and Tenses*, § 48). In point of significance also ἔδωκεν, as intimated, falls into line with this view; for δίδωμι, where the setting is responsive, means to **accord the right, to grant the privilege, to extend a commission to.** What

we would have, then, would be like this—"The revelation which Jesus Christ, in conformity with the Father's commission, imparted to John". Cf. with this the aorist of ἐδόθη in Matt. 28:18.

But why go to all this trouble? If we take ἀποκάλυψις to mean "appearance", and regard Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive, or even as a plain possessive, the thought is limpid and dilated with grandeur—"The appearance which Jesus Christ, granted leave of absence by the Father, made to John"; or, "Jesus Christ's appearance, which God the Father had foreordained and provided for in eternity, to the end that He might show" etc. In other words, this reappearance was, as it were, the culminating labor of love, which the Father had assigned to Jesus Christ as the closing episode of His incarnate work.*

Not that the book is not a revelation. It is. The ground for this assertion, however, is to be sought not in ἀποκάλυψις, but in δεῖξαι (to show). "From that time began Jesus to show (δεικνύειν) unto His disciples, that

*"The rendering of ἀποκάλυψις by 'appearance' rather than by 'revelation' is supported by the ancient Syriac, ܓܠܝܢܐ 'gilyana' ". In fact, gilyana' is the uniform rendering of ἀποκάλυψις in the N.T. as also of ἐπιφάνεια 'an appearing', as in I Tim. 6:14; II Tim. 1:10; 4:1; 4:8; Titus 2:13; and in II Thess. 2:8—(translated 'manifestation' in the R.V.) *Gilyana*' denotes an open manifestation, or appearance, something entirely uncovered, with the idea of the covering, if there ever was one, in the remote background. The old Nestorian Feast of the Transfiguration was called ܥܝܕܐ ܕܓܠܝܢܐ 'i'da' gilyana', the Feast of the Appearance. It is derived from the root ܓܠܐ, which means to show, or to make known; used, for instance, in Gen. 45:1, 'Joseph made himself known to his brethren'. It does carry the sense of 'reveal', (for it is evidently of the same original root as the Hebrew גלה to uncover), but rather indistinctly. Especially in its derivatives (e.g. the adverb ܒܓܠܝ 'openly') the uncovering is almost if not entirely forgotten. See Payne Smith's Syriac Dictionary."—F. D. Frazer.

He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up" (Matt. 16:21). This news was a *revelation* to His disciples. "For the Father loveth the Son, and **showeth** (δείκνυσιν) Him all things that Himself doeth: and greater works than these will He **show** (δείξει) Him, that ye may marvel" (John 5:20). *As man* Jesus kept receiving revelations from the Father during the whole of His ministry, and men "marvelled" more and more increasingly all the time. But to express this truth Christ, as John reports Him, makes use of δείκνυμι. Thus we lose nothing by this view; whereas by it we have in the Preface, where it belongs, a specific reference to one of the most remarkable things which occurred in connection with the book—an occurrence, in fact, which John had been notified that he should "tarry" for and expect.

At Olivet, then, when Jesus ascended, "a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9); now, stepping forth from His place of concealment, He makes Himself visible once more to His servant John—this time, however, not in humiliation, but in majesty and splendor unspeakable, as when "the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling." Moreover, He *appears* in order that He, or that the Father through Him, may "show", or *reveal*, what the future, both immediate and remote, has in store for the people of God.

Ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (what is bound to happen), and bound to happen **ἐν τάχει (in quick succession)**, one thing on the heels of another at intimate intervals, undisconnectedly. Things happen **ἐν (in the sphere of)** the fleeting moments,

in continuity, without a break, according to the law (δεῖ) of cause and effect. There is a fulness and continuity in ἐν τάχει which neither ταχύ nor ταχέως could have made us feel. What we have here is a sort of spiritual anticipation of the cinematograph. If we arrest the process, for the purpose of intensive contemplation, each historical incident may be singled out, as it were, and considered in the light of its own individuality, but for any real portrait of life we must see every historical incident in its "fleetness", in immediate connection with its antecedents and actual outcome.

Duly considered, right here, this little phrase will keep our feet from many a pitfall later on. We blunder oftentimes simply because we are in too great a hurry to reach the end. To begin with, it will not do to glide over that word "must" as though it were but a more or less insignificant auxiliary. It is a finite verb, which, as was intimated, holds within its compass the law of "Cause and Effect". It is not to be thought of, either, apart from that word "shortly", with which it is here infrangibly linked. To illustrate: I hate some one; I mean to murder him; I load a gun; I aim it; I touch the trigger; a cartridge explodes; a ball flies; the man falls dead. From start to finish it is effect following cause *at intimate intervals.* Barring out the two invisible causes at the beginning of the series, where are we to locate the crime? In loading the gun? In taking aim? In pulling the trigger? But apart from the definite purpose and completed plan in the mind of the doer no one of these three acts has any criminality in it. Each act receives its significance from

the place it holds and the part it plays in a process, and no one act is more significant than another. So it is with "dates" in history. What was the Fourth of July, 1776, more than any other day, intrinsically speaking, for American history? Without its antecedents it would never have been noted, and without the victories that followed, it would have been branded in history as an ignominious failure. To real thinking dates are but incidental. And John, it would seem, at the very outset, has given this note of warning, in the phrase in question, for the specific purpose of putting us on our guard against the fascinations of chronological schematizing. He appears to serve notice on us, at this early moment, that the Apocalypse is a book which deals not with the dates of history, but with its philosophy. One thing more should be noted. "Shortly", if we prefer that word as a translation, must be allowed to derive its significance from the incident or process in connection with which it is used. "Shortly," in the illustration above, could almost be the equivalent of "instantaneously", but in the slower movements of history it can be just as accurately used to cover an interval of centuries or even millenniums. It is by infinitesimal increments, however, in quick succession, bound together by cause and effect, that history spreads its branches through the ages under the sunlight of divine grace.

That the subject of δεῖξαι (to show) is **God** (Θεόν implied), is evident both from the proximity of Θεός and from the sense of the passage. Ἐσήμανεν (**He signified**), apprises us at the very outset of what is coming. The present

production is to be a book written in symbols. Impliedly, from the context, the subject is Christ. Alford thinks that the aorist participle ἀποστείλας **(having sent)**, is "contemporary with the aorist verb, not necessarily antecedent to it." That it is "not necessarily antecedent to it" is true, yet to regard it as antecedent would seem, on the whole, to be the better way. Christ—after He had sent through the agency of His angel, and had gotten everything in readiness, particularly in the mind and heart and life of John, and in the historical circumstances, so that John could understand everything thoroughly and set it forth intelligently—spoke to John in symbols. After all, Gebhardt's view, quoted by Jacobs in *Meyer*, gets rid, at one stroke, of the accidental and extraneous, and fastens the mind on the simple truth in its ultimate aspect, for he defines the angel as "the personification, so far as it respects the seer, of the whole revealing activity of God or Christ". John, the subject, possibly for years, of "the whole revealing activity" of Christ, was, in consequence, in proper condition to apprehend the symbolization in which the final inspired message to humankind was to be bodied forth. Note also that John is a **"servant"** (τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ) among other **"servants"** (τοῖς δούλοις). The "Sainting" of the Apostles and Evangelists in *ab extra*. They speak of themselves as servants.

2, 3. In ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν **(who bears witness to)**, we have an epistolary aorist: it has the force of a present, while at the same time it carries the mind back to the time when the writing was done. Its direct object is ὅσα εἶδεν **(as many things as he saw)**. The other two accusatives,

in τὸν λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ (**the Word of God**), and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (**the testimony of Jesus Christ**), are accusatives of specification, which have the effect of restricting the action of the verb to the topics enumerated. John, when he wrote, bore witness to as many things as he perceived—that is, with regard to two things, namely, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. By the phrase "he who reads and they who hear" John places the Apocalypse on a par with the Scriptures which were read publicly in the synagogues every Sabbath day. To this very end it was that the Sabbath was made. It was "made for man", **for mankind** (ἄνθρωπος), and *since* for mankind, *for all time*, that the whole human race might come to the house of God to hear the Scriptures read and expounded at least once a week. Nor must we overlook τηροῦντες (**those who keep their attention fixed upon, and observe**)—a strong and significant word, and one which we shall meet with frequently further on. On προφητείας (**prophecy**), Beckwith, p. 293, remarks: "It is interesting to notice in this connection that the author does not, like other apocalyptists, deliver his message under an assumed name. A true prophet came in his own person, spoke in his own character as directly sent by God—his personality was important. And so the writer of our book is too clearly conscious of his mission as a prophet to admit to his putting his message in any anonymous or pseudonymous form; he speaks to the readers as the John well known to them, while he is careful to show his credentials attesting his true prophetic office."

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

The reappearance of Jesus Christ, which God, that He might unveil for His servants the true philosophy of history, had arranged for. Accordingly, on appearing, the Lord Jesus, who had prepared the way beforehand through the agency of His angel, spoke in symbols to His servant John. John again, in his turn, bore witness to as many things as he saw—as touching, that is to say, the Word of God, which this document was to complete, and as touching the testimony of Jesus Christ, delivered once more in person even as aforetime in the flesh. Blessed is he who reads, and blessed are they who hear the words of this prophecy, and who, of course, address themselves with diligence to the task of observing the things that are written in it. For even now the process is in motion.

Chapter One, verses 1–3.

4. Ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις **(to the seven Churches),**—the beginning of that symbolism which ἐσήμανεν (v. 1) has led the reader to expect. There were more than seven Churches in Asia Minor. That only seven should be chosen was demanded by the plan on which the book was to be built. By this number, which signifies completeness, John proposes to enlist the attention of the church as a whole. The book, at bottom, is an epistle, and it opens accordingly with the customary form of epistolary address. It amounts to this—*John, to the church universal.* Much has been said about the grammar of ἀπὸ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος **(from the One who is, and the One who was, and the One who is continuously coming).** In reality,

however, the construction is just about as simple as if one were to say—He has a gift for whoever comes. The object of the preposition is the phrase, regarded as an indeclinable noun. Charles thinks that classical Greek "could have been preserved" if John had written" "ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁ ὤν". Swete is not quite so positive, for he says, "A more exact writer would perhaps have said ἀπὸ τοῦ ὁ ὤν κτλ". Düsterdieck, in *Meyer*, holds that the construction is "manifestly intentional", and that it would have been "impaired by the insertion of τοῦ". It is at least safe to say, with Beckwith, that the expression was "evidently adopted by the author designedly", and that it was not "due to ignorance of Greek construction." The thing to be concerned about, however, is the meaning. That opening participle is uniquely impressive. It has action in it, boundlessness, independence, unending continuity. Its force has to be felt rather than expressed in a translation. It is surcharged with the presence, the power, the majesty of the self-existent, ever present, interested, active God. He exists continuously, and makes His existence continuously felt. Furthermore, what is true at the moment always has been true. The imperfect has no participle, but it has no need of one, for it carries in itself the idea of continued past action. God existed continuously, and was *in the habit of* making his existence continuously felt, in the past. Ὁ ὤν, as it were, casts its mantle of continuity over ὁ ἦν. Moreover ὁ ὢν extends its influence over ὁ ἐρχόμενος. To translate the latter as meaning the One who "is to come" is distressingly inadequate. It means the One who is in the act of coming continuously,

who *keeps coming* all the time, as the days, the hours, the minutes, the very seconds roll by—yes, and who makes His presence felt *as He comes.* John is thinking of God as the One who holds His own universe absolutely in His own hands and makes it work out His own ends. God not only reveals what is to come to pass (v. 1); He keeps what comes to pass under His own scrutiny, and management, and control. His ends, however, He accomplishes through the sevenfold agency of the Holy Spirit. By designating the Holy Spirit as τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα (**the seven Spirits**), John first of all keeps the mind alive to the symbolical aspect of the writing, and then, with the same stroke, leads his readers to think of the Holy Spirit as the Person through whom the Father's will and plans complete their circuit and reach their goal. The Holy Spirit works for the Father, for He operates ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ (**in the presence of His throne**)—with a view that is to say, to visibilizing the divine **sovereignty** (θρόνος) and of making it articulate down to the very finger-tips of existence.

5. From the unlimited cycle of time as a whole John now scales down his radius until the circle he draws includes but the third of a century— καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (**and from Jesus Christ**). The foregoing thought is "made flesh" in a specific, concrete example. We are asked to think of Jesus here as an inhabitant of earth, a man among men, who always and everywhere bore witness to the truth and made His life an exemplification of it, who was crucified for doing so, who rose from the dead after He was crucified, and who, in consequence of this unexampled event, stands

first—the Conqueror *per se*, being now the **"Firstborn"** (ὁ πρωτότοκος) of the dead, and the **"Sovereign of sovereigns"** (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων), in comparison with whom earthly potentates, when laid in the balance, are "altogether lighter than vanity". This description, says Swete, stands "appropriately at the head of a book which represents the glorified Christ as presiding over the destinies of nations". Thus John serves notice on his readers, right at the outset, that however high he may soar he does not propose to get lost in the clouds. He is about to move among actualities, in touch with life and everyday experience—every pulsation of which is under the direct and immediate scrutiny and control of the Triune God. As for the grammar, it is irregular only if we make it so. The nominatives following the genitive, instead of being regarded as appositional, may be regarded as parenthetical. Such peculiarities, says Swete, "are partly due to the character of the book and perhaps are parenthetic rather than solecistic". So considered their forcefulness is multiplied indefinitely.

Shall we read λούσαντι (**to Him who washed**), or λύσαντι (**to Him who loosed**)? The external evidence, though not one-sided, is certainly partial to the latter. Charles says, "This is by far the best attested reading". It may be added that it is also by far the more appropriate in this connection. It holds within itself the keynote of the book, namely, that there is no conceivable excuse for incomplete Christianity. "Loosed once for all" from his sins—for that is the import of the aorist—a person has no excuse for falling away, no excuse for coming again into bondage to anything evil. Note also how this truth is emphasized

by the present tense in ἀγαπῶντι, **(to Him who loves us all the time)**. How can any Christian wound the heart of Him who loves us all the time, and who, by a single act on Calvary, "loosed" us once for all from the only power that could make us injure that continuous love?

6. In this verse the foregoing thought is further strengthened by a parenthesis. The καί **(and)**, as used here, is the mental equivalent of our word "besides"—Besides He consolidated us into a kingdom, making us individually priests unto God, even to His Father. The second καὶ is epexegetical and intensive—**even** to His Father. Christ binds His people together into a spiritual *association*. In serving Him they have the support of *companionship* and *mutual encouragement*. Furthermore, if everything else is cut off, they have direct access to God, for they are "priests"; can themselves, therefore, on the instant, enlist the power of the omnipotent arm to help them in time of need. Under such conditions what plea can any Christian put forward to justify himself for coming short? In αὐτῷ, **(to Him)**, the datives preceding the parenthesis are resumed. The **"glory"** (δόξα) here ascribed to Christ is His sublime moral commendableness in undertaking what He did, while the **"dominion"** (κράτος) must be thought of as practical capacity—capacity to make this moral commendableness universally operative. We shall meet the word frequently in its verbal form as we proceed, and in every instance it will suggest the ability to handle the situation.

7. How persistently this verse has been misinterpreted! How can anyone, with his eyes fastened on the Greek, deduce from this language the thought of a Second Advent

or of the general Judgment? Ἰδού (**behold**) has immediacy in it—*look up, look around you, right now.* The same is true of ἔρχεται (**He comes**)—is coming and keeps coming all the time, never ceases for a moment to come. The thought is that Christ was coming into their lives every day, and coming μετά (**in conjunction with, in coalition with**), the "clouds" that were surrounding the people of God at the moment. The "clouds" are Christ's allies. Life is not plain sailing, never will be, was never meant to be. It takes tribulation to make character. And is it not true that at that very hour the Christians of Asia Minor were passing through "clouds and thick darkness"? Nor do tribulations and hardships and reverses come exclusively to the righteous. Christ comes into the life of everybody—if not to develop and beautify, then to condemn; "every eye shall see Him". Καὶ οἵτινες (**even such**) as pierced Him shall see Him. Wicked men may shift and evade and try to close their eyes for a long while, but eventually, before death finally calls them in, they have to face the reality, and the reality is Christ. Swete: "οἵτινες is generic, pointing not so much to the original crucifiers as to those who in every age share the indifference or hostility which lay behind the act". And these, in every age, shall wail, and — ναί, ἀμήν— (**they ought to**); there is no excuse for crucifying the Son of God afresh, in every age, and putting Him to an open shame repeatedly as the centuries progress. Cities, for political purposes were divided into **tribes** (φυλαί). These are thought of here as "**earthly**" (τῆς γῆς), in contrast with the twelve tribes of the redeemed (ch. 7:4–8), and with those who by faith shall ally themselves with these (v. 9). Self-evidently only the unredeemed shall wail.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

JOHN—

TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES,

THE SYMBOLICAL SEVEN IN ASIA MINOR:

Grace to you and peace from the One who is actively present in all things, who was always actively present in all things, and who keeps coming actively into all things as they occur; and from the Holy Spirit, who, in His sevenfold operations, fulfils the sovereign will of the Father by keeping the universe, down to its ultimate atoms, under His oversight and immediate management; and from Jesus Christ, who in person visited this earth as a Redeemer, and bore a faithful testimony to the truth while He was here, and who, after He was crucified for His faithful witnessing, came forth from the grave as a Conqueror, the Firstborn of the dead, and on that account the Sovereign of sovereigns over all the earth. To Him who loves us all the time, with that discriminating love that "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth"; to Him who loosed us once for all 'from the fetters of' our sins 'in the shedding of' His blood—yes, and He consolidated us into a kindgom, and made us priests, each one individually, to God, even to His Father; to Him be glory ascribed, and capability to perform, through the cycles of the centuries; Amen. Open your eyes and look! He has a way of coming unceasingly, even as He is coming now, in conjunction with clouds and darkness and tempests; and not only to His own by way of discipline, but to the wicked as well; for every eye shall see Him—yes, even such as pierced Him on the cross shall

see Him; and 'upon the sight of Him' all the tribes that are contented with the earth and its earthiness shall wail, beating their breasts; yes, and even so, so let it be!

Chapter One, verses 4–7.

8. Charles (Vol. II, p. 238) says, "The MSS add here an early interpolation", and (p. 387) — "Here all the authorities add: 8". The evidence that "this verse is unquestionably interpolated", he maintains, is twofold—(a) it rests on "contextual grounds", and (b) on "textual or grammatical grounds". As for (a), if John heard these words, he must have "heard them in a vision"; but there is no statement to show that John "had fallen into a visionary condition or trance"; therefore if "1:8 is original, the text is fragmentary". To which, in reply, we may remark: (1) John may have heard, and doubtless did hear, these words in the vision in which the scene as a whole was first conveyed to his mind, for we must always remember that John had come into the possession of this magnificent panorama in its entirety before he ever sat down to write a line of it; (2) when the foregoing salutation and ascription of praise comes to a close it is "like the ceasing of exquisite music". For John, in such a setting, to have sandwiched in a trifling little explanatory clause—well, let us rejoice that John was inspired. The text as it stands bears the finger-prints of God. (3) The way has been carefully paved for just such a verse as this is. John brings the Father into view in the very first verse of the book. It is the Father who "commissions" the Son to come with the message. Then in the salutation (vv. 4, 5) he refers to the Triune God—the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. And now, as though to preclude

any mistake on the part of his readers, he uses precisely the same phrase here, in describing the Father, as he had used in v. 4. Note again, in this connection, the order of reference—the Father (v. 8); the Spirit (v. 10); the Son (v. 13) Artistically the text, as it stands interwoven with the context, is perfect. Then as for (*b*): Charles says, "John never disconnects ὁ Θεός ("God") and ὁ παντοκράτωρ ("Almighty"), for the very good reason that ὁ παντοκράτωρ represents a genitive in the Hebrew dependent on Θεός". It so happens, however, that John is not writing Hebrew, but Greek. He has placed the words in apposition, which makes good Greek and good English. And their separation here clothes the expression with an added majesty. Then, too, to say that "John never disconnects" the words is possible only in case we delete the places where he does. Of course, my hand is not in my pocket if I have taken it out. Here, Dr. Charles himself being witness, "*all the authorities add:* 8". Even in ch. 19:6 the weight of evidence seems to be in favor of retaining ἡμῶν. The contention therefore that these words cannot stand disconnectedly is gratuitous. It has the *facts* against it. God the Father, then, is the Alpha and the Omega, the sole source of intelligence and rationality, the self-existent, ubiquitous, interested Mind behind the moral order of the universe; and with nothing short of this truth could John be satisfied to open this magnificent book. For, strictly speaking, this is where the epistle—I mean the body of the epistle—begins. John has a way of beginning with the absolute origin. "In the beginning was the Word". "And the Word was God". So here; he begins with the Father; then all else follows logically.

9. John (v. 1) accounts himself as a "servant" among "servants"; now he speaks of himself as a "brother", since he and all Christians were equally related to "the Elder Brother", and as a **co-participant** (συνκοινωνός) in suffering, and in his standing in "the kingdom", and in his record for steadfast endurance. How much lay behind that simple statement! Ramsay, in *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, citing Mommsen, says that banishment, even for the well-to-do and persons of standing, "carried with it entire loss of civil rights and almost entire loss of property; usually a small allowance was reserved to sustain the exile's life. The penalty was life-long; it ended only with death. The exile was allowed to live in free intercourse with the people of the island, and to earn money. But he could not inherit money nor bequeath his own, if he saved or earned any; all that he had passed to the state at his death. He was cut off from the outer world, though he was not treated with personal cruelty or constraint within the limits of the islet, where he was confined." But there were weightier penalties for persons lower down. And it is by no means probable, says Ramsay again, that John "possessed either the birth, or the property, or the civic rights, entitling him to be treated on this more favored footing. He was one of the common people, whose punishment was more summary and far harsher than simple banishment to an island. . . . Banishment combined with hard labor for life was one of the grave penalties. Many Christians were banished in that way. It was a penalty for humbler criminals, provincials and slaves. It was in its worst forms a terrible fate: like the death penalty it was preceded by scourging, and

it was marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground in a dark prison, and work under the lash of military overseers". John, we may be sure, felt his full share of this **"pressure"** (θλίψις); while in him, as the present product of his pen attests, the **"patient endurance"** (ὑπομονή) of noble Christian character reached its zenith. Note the ἐν Ἰησοῦ (**'in connection with' Jesus**), 'in the sphere of Christ's companionship'; everything gets its value from being done 'in the cause of' Christ. Cf. Matt. 24:9; John 16:23; Acts 21:14. Charles's rendering of the aorist in ἐγενόμην (**"I found myself in"**), is exceptionally happy, and should be employed for the same word in v. 10. The thought is like this: "I found myself —for it was no plan of my own—on the island of Patmos, 'on account of' the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus; that is, for the purpose of receiving at the hands of Christ, though I had no thought of this at the time of my banishment, the final installment of Scripture, and the final personal testimony of the Faithful Witness". By διά (**on account of**), John indicates the reason which *God had in mind* for this whole occurrence. John "found himself" woven into a purpose that never dawned upon him until he was in the act of passing through the experience which it involved.

10. "I was in the Spirit", says John—ἐν (**'in the grasp of'**), 'under the dominance of', 'at the complete disposal of', the Holy Ghost; so that the Spirit of God and John's spirit coalesced to the point of becoming indistinguishable. It is just John's way of describing how his inspiration, in this particular instance, came about, the process by which he

and the Holy Spirit came to think in precisely the same terms.

Ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ **(on the Lord's day)**,—not necessarily, but appropriately and with overwhelming probability, the first day of the week, the Sabbath of the New Dispensation. How this expression originated and became current, and what suggested it, is an interesting study. Even before the Christian era, it would seem, the *first day of the month* was known as "Emperor's Day" (Σεβαστή). Charles cites Deissmann (*Bible Studies*, 218 sq.; *Encyc. Bib.* iii. 2815 sq.); Lightfoot (*Apostolic Fathers*, I ii. 714); "two inscriptions from Ephesus and Kabala" and "an Oxyrhynchus papyrus (*circ.* 100 A.D.)"—remarking that " it is inferred by Buresch (*Aus Lydien*, 1898, pp. 49–50) and Deissmann" that the "Emperor's Day" was *a day of the week.* "If these conclusions are valid", he adds, "we can understand how naturally the term 'Lord's Day' arose; for just as the first day of each month, or a certain day of each week, was called 'Emperor's Day', so it would be natural for Christians to name the *first day* of each week, associated as it was with the Lord's resurrection and the custom of Christians to meet together for worship on it, as 'Lord's Day'." On that day John heard a **"great voice"** (φωνὴν μεγάλην); not mere vociferosity—the Apocalypse is not a book "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"—but a voice that was decisive, a voice that had finality in it, a voice that said, Γράψον **(Write)**.

11. In ὃ βλέπεις **(what you see)**, we have the past, the present and the future "in the instant". What John "saw" seriatim, at a given time, (v. 19), was to him an ever-

present possession from that time on. Much could be said about the seven Churches. They were not chosen at random. They lay in the order named along one of the great travelled circuits of Asia Minor. They were distributing centres for the mail service of that day. From these cities the message of the Apocalypse could reach the greatest number in the shortest time. Later on we shall see how the conditions in these cities furnished John with the nucleus of what the spirit instructed him to write about. Through these Churches the reader was to see symbolically the church in its entirety. Ramsay (*Letters*, p. 191)—an indispensable book to the student of the Apocalypse—speaks of these cities as lying "on a route which forms a sort of inner circle round the Province", and as being "the best points on that circuit to serve as centres of communication with seven districts".

12, 13. Τὴν φωνὴν ἥτις **(the voice—whatever it was, and from whatsoever source or from whomsoever, it came)**; until he "turned to look", until he stopped to observe and think, John was at sea. On turning he saw "seven golden candlesticks". In the Holy Place of the tabernacle there was but one candelabrum (Ex. 37:17); in the Holy Place of the Solomonic temple, ten (II Chron. 4:7); here, in keeping with the symbolism, seven. A candelabrum was a light-bearer. Seven of these are exhibited in vision to the eye of John, to signify to him, as the sequel shows, that the church of the living God is the divinely constructed and completely equipped light-bearing institution of the world.

Particularly to be noted in this connection is the fact that the candelabra require us to think of the Holy Place,

as distinguished from the Outer Court, on the one hand, and from the Holy of holies, on the other. The question of the Apocalypse is not—"How shall men be converted?" but—"How shall converted men conduct themselves in a wicked world?" The Outer Court was constructed and furnished with a view to objectifying the thought of the atonement, in its narrower sense; the application, namely, of the blood of the Saviour to the soul of the sinner, resulting in regeneration, and thus supplying a starting-point for the godly life. In the text this Court is tacitly passed by. It is with what follows upon this that the Apocalypse has to do. The regenerate man, *in the process of sanctification*, must feed on "the bread of the Presence"—typified in the tabernacle by the "table of shewbread"; must keep himself in constant communication with a throne of grace—typified in the tabernacle by the priest offering incense on the golden altar; and must shine as a light in the world—typified in the tabernacle by the candelabrum, whose glowing tongues of flame were carefully to be kept from ever growing dim. So here; the Son of man, the "Bread of Life", is girded for service at the altar of incense, to place His imprimatur on "the prayers of the saints", that His church may shine as "the light of the world". That it is "*the* Son of man" who is spoken of here is evident, though the A.V. rendering—"one like unto the Son of man"—is incorrect. Jesus Christ was not "*like*" the Son of man; He *was* the Son of man. The R.V. is accurate; He was "like unto a son of man", but as the description shows He was infinitely more than that. John aims to have us think of Jesus Christ as the One who has passed *through* the Outer Court, that is

to say, *through the crucifixion*, and who, since He is thus qualified to be our Saviour, has come to "walk" (2:1) with us through life as our Friend and Companion, and to minister for us at the throne of grace as our Intercessor and Advocate with the Father. Being thus "in the midst of the candlesticks", therefore, and being thus employed, what has He not a right to expect in the way of light on the part of those who have named His blessed Name?

14–16. Why expositors should weary themselves to trace every figure of speech and turn of thought in this description to some similar figure of speech or turn of thought in some writer of foregone centuries is hard to understand, harder to understand than the description is. John was just as much of an entity as Daniel or Ezekiel was. The same Spirit that inspired them inspired him. His mind was as independent as was theirs, or anyone else's. When He turned and looked the Son of God full in the face, he did not sit down to co-ordinate what he saw with what he had read in Ezekiel, or in Daniel, or in Enoch, or in the Maccabees; he simply wrote down what he himself saw with his own eyes. When master minds are describing the same Person, what wonder if there should be correspondences in their descriptions? John himself stood eye to eye with the Christ in His glory, and he portrays Him as being crowned with a wisdom which has behind it, and is guaranteed by, unnumbered eternities of immaculate holiness; as being able to look things through unlimitedly with the eye of omniscience; as being ready to walk into the crucible of justice and stand there complacently in its molten metal until His righteous ends shall have been accom-

plished; and as being possessed of a voice which no ear can be so deaf or so indifferent as not to hear. This incomparable Christ—the one Workman of the ages who "needeth not to be ashamed"—holds high in the heavens, in His own right hand, as a beacon of hope, the perfected influence of His church, and goes forth to the task that lies before Him with nothing but the truth of the ever living Word of God as His instrument of persuasion. He is Himself the supernal embodiment of that truth, and His countenance accordingly is like the sun in its splendor. The scene was more than even the Beloved Disciple could endure. In the presence of his glorified Lord he collapsed. Charles thinks that ὡς χιών (**as snow**) is "manifestly a marginal gloss", and that "it is extremely awkward in its present context". On the contrary, it has the eloquence of eternity in it. John was not writing a Greek grammar or parsing Hebrew; he was telling his readers that he had seen Christ, and that His head—that is to say His hair—was white, as wool is white, as snow—pure driven snow— is white. His thought lingered on the whiteness of that Head. Why is it not as essential to catch something of the fervor of a writer as it is to analyze his syntax? Even while John was penning the words, long after the vision was past, he could have said, no doubt, with Habakkuk, "My body trembled" (Hab. 3:16 R.V.). Mine trembles now, when I *read* the words, after eighteen centuries! How tame it would have been had John left off the ὡς χιών! The exact meaning of χαλκολιβάνῳ, (**burnished brass, R.V.**), has not as yet been definitely ascertained, but we shall not be far astray, perhaps, if we think of it as designating a metal which no fire

could melt, or at least as a metal which only the intensest heat conceivable could melt. If we supply τῆς χαλκολιβάνου and construe it with πεπυρωμένης as a genitive absolute, the clause will yield results than which nothing better could be asked—His feet were like glowing copper as it is in a furnace, when the glowing copper is on the point of having been perfectly purified. Nor is there any real difficulty, it seems to me, in ἔχων (**having**), or in ἐκπορευομένη (**going forth**), or in the finite verb φαίνει (**shines**). We have instinctively been supplying a past tense in the preceding clauses; why not continue to do so? And He *was* One who *is* continually holding in His right hand the seven stars, and forth from whose mouth *is* always going a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* as the sun *is* when it shines at its strongest,— ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ (**in its dynamic power**).

17, 18. Swete: "The Hand which sustains Nature and the Churches at the same time quickens and raises individual lives". Jesus laid on John the same right hand that was holding aloft the influence of the Christian church. How little Jesus would have to expunge from the character of John before He could exalt him to a place of honor and power in the firmament of the Father's service! Only the person whose "life is hid with Christ in God" can appreciate what we have in these two verses. Their implications are as wide as the eternities, and apart from their teaching Christian assurance would be groundless. "Fear not: as for me, I am the First and the Last." Christ's *experience* covers all things. He speaks from *knowledge*. As the "First" He had no beginning; as the "Last" He will have

no end. Between these two *termini*, however, He emerges into history, where again, on a smaller scale, He is the "First"—beginning, so to speak, with the Annunciation—and the "Last", even as He was looking, at the moment, into the face of John. This narrower circle of thought, though inseparable from the wider, is emphasized by the immediately following καὶ ὁ Ζῶν (**even the Living One**), where καί is evidently epexegetical. Ζῶν has in it the whole vitality of the timeless present participle—even the One with respect to whom "living" has been an eternal uninterrupted experience. The καί (**and**), in καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρός (**and I came to be a corpse once**), is not to be co-ordinated with the καὶ in καὶ ἰδού (**and behold**), but with the καί in καὶ ἔχω (**and I have**). The meaning is like this: **I did**, for the moment, in so far as my body was concerned, **become a corpse once**—and yet, look! I am living in the full enjoyment of that same life I never parted with and never will part with—**and hence**, in consequence of this twofold experience of the death of the body and the continued, simultaneous, unbroken life of the spirit, **I have** the keys both of Death and of that Unseen World into which Death ushers all men; the proof of which you have in the fact that I am living now, and laying my hand upon you, and talking with you. The Biblical conception, after all, is not obscure. All enter Hades at death, and Hades is hell if there is no way out of it. The "rich man" was in Hades, and "in torments"; what he wanted to find was a way out. The trouble was that he was minus the key. Jesus, the instant He "gave up the ghost", was in the Unseen World, called in Hebrew "Sheol" (Ps. 16:10), in Greek "Hades" (Acts

2:27). His "soul" was not left there, but was instantly shown "the path of life" into "the fulness of joy" at "the right hand" of God (Ps. 16:10–11); instantly, for Jesus was "in Paradise" in time to welcome the thief (Lk. 23:43) who did not die until his legs were broken later on in the afternoon (John 19:32, 33). Jesus has the key of Death, for He passed experientially through "the gates" of Death into the Unseen World; He has the key of the Unseen World, for He passed experientially through "the gates" of Hades on out into Paradise. Now that He had returned from Paradise to the island of Patmos to take the witness stand in the presence of John, the circuit was complete. Linked up with Christ, then, what has any man to "fear" from death? With Him there is nothing but life—"even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3)—for the "second death" is powerless (2:11). Note further before passing, that Christ's appearance on this occasion was "beautiful in its time", not only in that He was now equipped to give first-hand evidence on the certainties of immortality, but also in that enough time had now elapsed, since the crucifixion, to furnish facts and illustrate principles which the "Faithful Witness" could weave into His testimony in such a way as to make the divine programme for subsequent human history intelligible to John. Time had provided a historical nucleus to begin on. In fact, the whole setting here is suited to show that Jesus had this moment in mind when He intimated that John should "tarry" till He should come.

19. This verse is pivotal. On our view of it depends in large measure our view of all that follows. To give every word its full face-value one would need to translate to this

effect: Write, then, what you saw, namely, a description of things as they are, and whatever is about to happen (or to have happened) in conformity with these things. If, with Tischendorf, Weiss and Nestle, we adopt the aorist infinitive instead of the present,—they seem to be about equally attested,—we have an air of finality here which is in peculiar accord with the book as whole. "Which is about to have happened" carries upon it the stamp of divinity. It recognizes a future, but intimates that in the eyes of God—for in this case John "saw" what God saw—the future is as if it were past. John, had on "the Lord's day (v. 10), seen the whole vision. The vision, as the aorist (εἶδες) indicates, was a unit. It consisted in John's having seen, once for all, in their ultimate reality, things—that is, facts and underlying principles—as they were actually existing at the moment. All space, as it were, had been summoned to one spot; all time had been gathered into an instant; and the searchlight of truth had been turned on the scene in such a way as to enable John to read the **historical present** (ἃ εἰσὶν) with an insight of a kind with God's. John had been granted a "look into the seeds of time", had been so enlightened by the Spirit that he could "say which grain (would) grow and which (would) not", and had been qualified both by inspiration and by instinct to perceive that every grain, whether good or bad, would bring forth "after its kind". The period was in the neighborhood of half a century; the spot, in particular, was the western regions of Asia Minor; the seeds were truth and error; as right and wrong worked out then they would work out always. To translate μετά as meaning merely **"after"** is to

rob it of more than half its force; it does mean "after" where the thought in mind is simply sequence in point of time or place or rank, but where the matter in hand is more profound and elemental, as in the present instance, the preposition takes on a correspondingly vital significance; it means '*in continuity with*', '*in consequence of*', '*as of a piece with*'. After all, the skilful dissecting of history into more or less appropriate divisions is merely an artifice for mental convenience; history itself is a continuous fabric, the threads of which, though they appear and disappear and reappear in multiform ways and at varying distances, are never broken. And this, in my judgment, is the thought of the present verse.

20. "This verse", says Charles, "is independent grammatically of what precedes", adding that we have an accusative absolute in τὸ μυστήριον (**the mystery**), and that instead of the following accusative—τὰς ἑπτὰ λυχνίας (**the seven candlesticks**)—we should have expected a genitive construction. So also Swete. That a new sentence begins with v. 20 would seem to be obvious. Thus the accusative with which it opens must be an accusative absolute. But the two clauses at the end of the sentence make it equally obvious that the *second* accusative as well as the *first* is an accusative absolute. *As for* the one, it is so and so; *as for* the other, it is so and so. Grammatically the four members of the sentence maintain a perfect balance. Furthermore, this construction is demanded by the meaning. A "mystery" is simply something from which the veil has not as yet been taken away. Now the significance of "the seven stars" had not yet been unveiled. What

they were meant to set forth was still a "mystery". But the meaning and significance of the "golden candlesticks" had been a matter of common knowledge for centuries. The reason therefore why John did not use the genitive instead of the accusative in the second instance was because he wanted to be accurate. As the sentence stands, the first thing was a "mystery" while the second was not—which accords with the facts. If we translate it as it is written, the sentence is clear—"As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon my right hand, and as for the seven golden candlesticks, the seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches, and the candlesticks *are* the seven Churches".

But the "angels"—who are they? Admittedly the church of Jesus Christ is intended to consist of members who are "wise", wise with the "wisdom that is from above", which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy" (Jas. 3:17); of members who propose to leave nothing undone that will tend to bring their fellow men into "the paths of righteousness" and everlasting bliss; of members who, in the hands of Christ, are to become the power of God unto salvation" in the reclamation of the lost. But Daniel tells us (12:3), that "they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever". That is to say, good lives, held aloft in the right hand of Jesus Christ, are His "angels", His messengers of hope, to a fallen race. But Christ, we may be sure, will not hold aloft in His right hand anything that is morally

equivocal. To do so would be disastrous. It is never therefore the church's actual constituency at any given time, composed as it is of both the good and the bad, that Christ can count on; it is never its actual immediate effect on the world that He can make use of as ideal. How could He hold Nicolaitans or Jezebelites up as being worthy of imitation? And there are always enough of these and their kind in the church to besmirch its good name. It is rather the purified, the refined, the etherealized effect of the church, its influence purged from dross, that Christ can display as valuable and exemplary, and can work with in impressing men with the advantage of being saved. Charles, after discarding other interpretations, says, "Hence the only remaining interpretation is that which takes these angels to be the heavenly doubles or counterparts of the Seven Churches, which thus come to be identical with the Churches themselves". Ramsay (*Letters*, p. 68 sq.): "In the language of the Roman poets, the divine figure of the Emperor on earth has a star in heaven that corresponds to it and is its heavenly counterpart. . . . The star, then, is obviously the heavenly object that corresponds to the lamp shining on the earth, though superior in character and purity to it; and, as the lamp on earth is to the star in heaven, so is the Church on earth to the angel. Such is the relation clearly indicated. The angel is a corresponding existence on another and higher plane, but more pure in essence, more closely associated with the divine nature, than the individual Church on earth can be". So also, in effect, Plummer (*Pulpit Com.*): "The identification of the angel of each Church with the Church itself is shown in a

marked way by the fact that, although each epistle is addressed to the angel, yet the constantly recurring refrain is, 'Hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches', not 'to the *angels* of the Churches'. The angel and the Church are the same under different aspects: the one is its spiritual character personified; the other is the congregation of believers who collectively possess this character". It is only when the candlestick on earth shines out like a star in the firmament of grace that its radiance can return as a beneficent "messenger" to illumine mankind.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the self-existent Source of all thought and intelligence, saith the Lord God; I am active now, I always was active, I will always be active in the affairs of men, the supreme omnipotent Controller of everything that is, from the minutest atom to the mightiest mind.

I, John, your brother in Christ, and a common participant with you in the matter of tribulation, and in the matter of standing and importance in the kingdom, and in the matter of patient endurance in the cause of Jesus, found myself on an island, called Patmos, for the purpose, as it so happened, of receiving the final portion of the Word of God and the closing personal testimony of the Lord Jesus. I found myself under the complete superintendence of the Holy Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a speaking-trumpet: "What you see write in a book, and send it to the seven Churches—to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and

Laodicea". And I turned to see the voice, or whatever it was, that was talking with me. And when I turned, I saw seven golden candelabra. And in the centre of the encircling candelabra I saw what seemed to be a son of man. He had been clothed in a garment reaching down to the feet, and had been engirdled with a golden belt just below the breasts, and was thus apparelled and ready for action when I saw Him. His head—I mean His hair—was white, as wool is white—white as snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like copper, as it is in a furnace when it is on the point of having been melted. His voice was like the sound of many waves of water rolling into shore. He was a person who holds seven stars in His right hand continuously, and from whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword is constantly going forth. His countenance was as the sun is when the sun shines at its strongest.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. He placed His right hand on me, however, and as He did so, said: "Have no fear; as for me, I am the First and the Last, even the Living One in whom life is intrinsic; I even became a corpse once as regards my body, and yet, as you see, I am living now, and living with a life that belongs to the eternities. Consequently I have the keys of Death and of the Unseen World, and, as my presence here attests, have used these keys out of the Unseen World into Paradise and am back again on earth.

Write, therefore, what you saw—even the facts, together with the principles involved in them, as the period through which you have just passed exhibits them at the present moment; and write also what the future is about to unfold

in pursuance of the inexorable laws that underly these facts and principles.

As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and as for the seven golden candelabra,—well, the seven stars are the genuine drossless messengers of light which the seven Churches send forth into the world, whereas the candelabra are the seven Churches themselves.

Chapter One, verses 8–20.

CHAPTER II

LIFTING THE CURTAIN

The Reappearance

THIS book, like other books that are not nearly so wonderful, opens up in the usual way with a Preface and an Introduction. The Preface is short, consisting of three verses. The Introduction covers the rest of the chapter. It is possible, of course, to make a more elaborate analysis, but what is gained in differentiation is lost in interest. It is not our purpose to dwell on the mechanism of the book any further than to do so may promise to throw light on the message. Our chief concern is to master the meaning.

The Preface sets before us the fact that God proposes to unfold to His own people, in broad and general outline, the plans and principles according to which He in His wisdom intends to deal with human conduct and regulate human destiny, now that the Volume of Divine Instruction, on the issuance of this present writing, will have received its final and finishing touch. So precious and important is this piece of information that Jesus Christ has been granted leave of absence, as it were, to come from the right hand of the Majesty on high to talk with John on Patmos. There must be no uncertainty about the matter to be disclosed in this book, no excuse for questioning its authorization, no room for doubt or misconception or mistake of any kind. The communication must come through a trustworthy man

who can say that he has "seen and heard". John accordingly, as he tells us, saw his Lord in person, heard again those familiar accents of former days, and then, as a faithful witness, bore testimony to "as many things" as had reached his mind through ear and eye. It was no second-hand or hearsay evidence that he was summoned to that lonely island to receive and pass along. It was a message from a Friend with whom he had spent many a happy hour in years gone by, whose countenance he could look upon while the words were being uttered, and in whose voice he could discern the rhythm of the universe.

And John, it should be said with emphasis, was the best qualified and most competent person on the earth to receive such a revelation. The items of his equipment were remarkable. The Old Testament Scriptures had come to be a component element of beauteous design in the fabric of his mind. He was as familiar with the life of Jesus in the flesh as was possible to human capacity. For sixty years since the cloud had received the Son of man out of his sight Christianity in its finest essence had been passing through the alembic of his soul, transforming his life into that that was "good and acceptable and perfect", even the will of God. And he had had experience, for this was not the first time that he had been assigned the task of writing as he was "moved by the Holy Ghost". In every way conceivable he was uniquely prepared both to receive and to transmit the additional "Word of God" and "testimony of Jesus Christ" which he had been selected to record, and to be entrusted with which it had been divinely arranged that he should be banished to Patmos.

One thing more is pertinent to the Preface. Of the "divers portions" of the Word of God the Book of Revelation is to be the last, the one in which all that has been written hitherto is in a manner to be projected into history, the one that is to tell the coming ages what they must expect if, on the one hand, they disregard the oracles of God, and what illimitable hopes they may have a right to cherish if, on the other, they will but yield themselves as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. It is to be an anticipatory account of the way in which all the antecedent provisions of the divine mind for the human race, as recorded in the Scriptures, will verify themselves pragmatically as time strides forward into unrolling millenniums. Blessed therefore are they who make themselves acquainted with the things that are written in this book, and who live accordingly, for the period when the whole world may thus have a completed revelation within its reach, and consequently no excuse for continued obliquity, has at length arrived. With this present contribution—for this is the import of the sentence—the entire human race is finally provided with the perfect means of living right. Even now the new era is in the act of starting. "The time is at hand."

In his Introduction John may be said to make us acquainted with himself, then with the Father, then with the Son. As for himself he is commissioned to write a letter to the church of the living God. For, that there were more than "seven Churches" in Asia Minor, and that every Church in existence would profit immeasurably by a knowledge of whatever the Apostle might choose to write, every original reader would realize instantly. The instinctive

and universal conclusion, accordingly, would almost of necessity be that John had already begun to speak in symbols. By a sort of intuition his readers would say, "He is sending a message to the church as a whole".

But who is this man? What kind of a heart does he have? All unconsciously he reveals himself, breathing benedictions of grace and peace It is but a common salutation, it is true, but the salutations of inspired writers are not formalities. They always emit certain scintillations, faint though they may be, of the smouldering thoughts which are destined to find expression in fuller fashion further on. The one before us is particularly suggestive. Manifestly John is thinking of the Father, of the Holy Spirit and of the Son, in the order named, but he is thinking of these three Persons in a characteristic way. When he speaks of Him who is and who was and who keeps continually coming, he is not thinking abstractly of the existence and eternity of God, but of His perpetual interest and activity in the affairs of men. He was present and active providentially in all the occurrences of the past; He is present and active providentially in all the occurrences of the instant; He will for ever be present and active providentially in all the occurrences of the ages as they come. Grace to you and peace from Him who never takes His hand off the throttle. John was no Deist, getting God off into some quiet corner of the universe to rest Himself. God was no idle onlooker, never had been, never would be. It is as though John had recalled those words of Jesus, "My Father worketh hitherto", and then had added, "nor will He ever cease to work; grace to you and peace from Him".

And this thought with which he starts he follows unbrokenly, for the same aspect of immediate interest and unintermittent concern makes itself felt in the next expression. John feels no need of enunciating the personality of the Spirit. As much as that is assumed. He is thinking of the Holy Spirit as regards His operations, which are sevenfold, perfect, all-pervasive. He is thinking of the omnipresence of the Spirit; how that nothing can elude His activity; how that no atom of the universe can exist, or start, or stop, apart from His energy and orders and oversight; how that in His dealing with men, whether He is working on society at large or on the individual heart, He never recedes, or swerves from His purpose, or comes short of His ultimate aim. John is inviting his readers to plunge with him into the very vortex of time, into the whirling multiplicities of life, into the seething animosities of anticipated history, into the turmoils, the distractions, the upheavals, the catastrophes of human society, and he is preparing the way by invoking upon them grace and peace from Him apart from whose immediate supervision not so much as an emotion can rise or vanish, and apart from whose benignant presence and enlightening aid no eye can look upon the scene and be at one with the outcome.

Then too, that John has his eye fastened on the practical world of fact and experience is further evidenced, when he adds, "And from Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth". As formerly, so here again, he takes certain things for granted. The pre-existent state is assumed. He is getting ready to deal with mundane actualities. Jesus was

faithful while he was in the flesh, going about from day to day doing good. He was a witness whose faithfulness carried Him triumphantly through the throes of martyrdom. For once, however, death had grappled with One who was too much for it. He broke its bands, burst its bars, and issued from its gates—

"The high imperial type of this earth's glory".

Upon his readers therefore once again John implores the grace and peace of Him who never quibbled, who never winced, who conquered even death, and who, since He vanquished every enemy down to the very last and bitterest of all, is in consequence a present and everlasting Sovereign upon a spotless throne.

Thus, even in his salutation, John forecasts all the tangled convolutions of the coming ages, and intimates that each in its appointed hour will come to pass under the uniform direction of the Father of lights who sits at the helm of the universe and orders its course; under the plastic art and energy of the Holy Spirit who acts at all times everywhere, nor ever stays His hand until His work is perfected; and under the executive administration of Him who has sounded the depths and traversed the heights of human experience, leaving no foe of righteousness unconquered, and who, as a reward, has been highly exalted, and given "a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

That benedictions enjoyed should be productive of praise is indeed a self-evident truth, though in life as we live it, we are forced to admit, it is not always an incarnate reality. Not so with John. He has himself received the benedictions which he is bespeaking for others. There is but one thing to do, and he does it. All unconsciously again he shows what he is. Benedictions enjoyed break forth into praise. A sovereign is not always loving or lovable; this Sovereign is both. His exaltation is infinite, yet He loves us. Had he not loved us, and loved us immeasurably, He would not have loosed us from our sins by the shedding of His blood. He has broken our chains. So unconditionally has He set us free from the bondage of our iniquities that even the slightest declension from our "first love" is but a matter of ingratitude and wholly inexcusable. If there is ever any lapse or moral retrogression on our part, the fault is with us, for we have been clothed with the power of inhibiting our carnal propensities and of crucifying the old man with his deeds. Moreover, He has not sent us forth to fight the battle of life in solitude and out of touch with congenial society. On liberating us from the empery of Satan He has consolidated us into a kingdom—into a kingdom of which He is Himself the King, so that He at least is always available as our great Companion, our intimate Associate, our loving, compassionate, adorable Protector and personal Friend. And then, to crown it all, the kingdom is a kingdom of priests, every one of whom is under orders to keep himself ready to enter the Holy of holies at any moment, there to converse, face to face and undismayed, with Him who sits upon the Mercy Seat in purity

ineffable. Unto Him therefore who has made such incomparable provisions for carrying out the programme of grace let us ascribe, through ages unending, both glory and capacity—glory, for the magnificent largeness of heart which led Him to accept such a stupendously forbidding task; capacity and grasp, in acknowledgment of His having brought, and of His ability to keep, all the hostile forces of the universe under the mastery of His will. Yes, since He is worthy of our love and our uttermost confidence, and is deserving of all adoration and praise—SO LET IT BE!

And this interposition of the Triune God in the affairs of men, as John would have us know, is no phantastic dream. Look around you, he says. "Behold, He cometh with the clouds"—keeps coming continuously, every day, in conjunction with the mysteries of providence; in persecutions, in deliverances, in the foiling of evil, in fresh denials, fresh betrayals, fresh crucifixions, in the crash and carnage of battles, in the faith of the saint, in the fortitude of the martyr, in the remorse of the lost. To evade Him is impossible. Every eye will have to see Him. Did not they that pierced Him on Calvary see Him? Even so they that pierce Him at any time shall see Him. Men cannot get quit of the Son of man with a spear. In fact, all the tribes of the earth —tribes that cleave to their earthiness, preferring darkness to light because their deeds are evil—shall, upon the sight of Him, wail and beat their breasts in the torments of despair. As to whether it shall or shall not have to deal with Christ, humankind has no option. He comes into men's lives universally and irresistibly. The good see Him and are glad. The wicked see Him, and mourn. Yes, says

John, and since again not to own and adore Him is to hold in contempt the offered pardon for eternal guilt—SO LET IT BE!

Thus it is that John, almost—perhaps altogether—without knowing it, has introduced us to himself. Towards his fellow men he is tender and compassionate. He is not willing that any should perish, but is anxious instead that the blessings of the Trinity shall rest upon all flesh. Towards his ascended Lord, the sovereign Saviour of men, he is ecstatically reverential, eager to ascribe all honor to Him, delighted to acknowledge every favor down to the veriest atom of it as a gift from His hand. Toward the programme of God in unfolding the moral order of the universe he is as cool and calculating as the perfectest scientific method could demand. He analyzes the clouds in the spiritual skies above and around him, be they clouds of discipline or clouds of wrath, in the same spirit as the physicist would set about to decompose a drop of water. The merest mist, whether it swells into a thunder-storm or melts away in the sunlight, comes into being at the bidding of the only wise God, is appropriate in its place, and serves its purpose as the agent of His will. John is willing to look, to take account of what he sees, to record the facts, perfectly assured in his own mind that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

> "Indeed the especial marking of the man
> Is prone submission to the heavenly will—
> Seeing it, what it is, and why it is".

And then, finally, as regards the end, he brings us to our feet, almost stupefied, before his balanced mind. With

him, as with God, nothing counts but righteousness. Let God but speak and his spirit will acquiesce. His heart beats in unison with the heart of Christ. When the Lord of glory saves, his soul responds, "Even so; amen". When the Lord of glory condemns in wrath, his soul, with equal promptitude, responds again, "Even so; amen". From this time forward therefore we know the man who brings the message.

In introducing us to the Father John is very brief. Behind all the vicissitudes of history there is an infinite rationality. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God." In the alphabet of intelligence and knowledge and wisdom He is not merely the first letter and the last, but all that comes between. Even with Himself as speaker, He is more than the best and the uttermost that language can be made to say. Apart from Him thought has no source no origin, no background, is incomplete, impossible, in fact. "The existence of the personal God, the absolute Reason", says Harris, in his *Self Revelation of God*, "is a necessary postulate of all ratiocinated and scientific knowledge. Its pre-supposition, explicit or implicit, is necessary to the human intellect in order that it may complete its processes, solve its inevitable problems and properly discharge its functions; and the reality of God's existence is necessary to the reality of the knowledge thus attained". It is this truth that speaks to us through the assertion, "I am the Alpha and the Omega". God cannot be the Alpha and the Omega without being the intelligent God, the thought-basis of the universe, reason's ALL IN ALL.

And yet withal He must not be thought of as a mere

ethereal absentee or metaphysical postulate, but as a living, interested, active, omnipresent Person, who, in all His energy as Almighty God, exists and makes His thinking felt at every passing moment, existed and made His thinking felt in ages gone, and will keep coming in such a way as to make His existence and His thinking felt as the centuries roll by—the Unmoved Mover, the All-Efficient Engineer, of everything that lives and moves and has a being, the One who "reveals Himself", to quote again from Harris, "in the universe as a whole, both in the abiding products of His action in the past and in His continuous action through all time". The world, John would have us to remember at the outset, is in the hands of a Thinker, and of a Thinker who is competent to make His thinking effective, and never fails to do it.

And now, says John, this Thinker, who holds the affairs of men in the hollow of His hand, sent His Son to talk with me. It happened on this wise. "I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest write in a book and send it to the seven Churches." These words, by way of prelude, are by no means insignificant. They are meant to impress upon the readers that the writer of this book is only a man like themselves. In no instance is an inspired writer a man who stands apart from the affairs of his day. The authors of the Bible were not a set of cloistered anæmics. They plunged into the great com-

panionship of struggling human souls. We find them in every relationship of life. They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they married and were given in marriage, just like their neighbors. They knew what it was to see a wife or a tender little one sick, or dying, or laid away in the tomb. John for some unaccountable reason seems to have escaped the marital net, but he was not without his share of other things to make "earth's smoothness rough" or roughness smooth, as the case might be. If other men had "tribulation", so had he—of the same kind and of equal severity. If they were in the "kingdom", and were led to ask why they, notwithstanding their loyalty, should be called upon to suffer—well, he too was in the kingdom, and it had been laid on him, not the less but all the more, to endure hardship on that account. Had they been standing steadfastly when under trial? So had he. It will not do to say that he was only banished. We look on banishment too lightly. When the Friar informs Romeo that he has been sentenced into banishment, Romeo replies:

"Ha! — banishment? — be merciful, say, death;
For exile hath more terror in his look,
Much more than death: do not say banishment".

And then, a little later, he adds:

"Calling death banishment,
Thou cut'st my head off with a golden axe,
And smil'st upon the stroke that murders me".

And the fiery sentiment of the youthful Romeo is merest foam beside the fervent Christian love of John the aged. Does anyone suppose that John could part with his faithful

friends, who were momentarily face to face with the likelihood of martyrdom, without a pang? Not to be with them in their hours of trial was to him a source of torture. He was but a "brother" therefore, one in Christ with each and all of them, and a participant with them in all their anxieties and perils and persecutions. He was a common man among common men, and nothing more than a common man among common men. Nor was there anything extraordinary about the spot to which he had been exiled. The message came to him not in some strange, unheard of, mysterious, creepy cavern, the habitat of weird associations, haunted in the popular imagination by uncanny spectres and unearthly things, but on a forlorn little island, out in the very eye of heaven, and washed on every side by the ceaseless billows of the grey old monotonous sea. To this disconsolate, unromantic, wind-swept ocean-rock he had been sent for the purpose, though he knew it not at the time of banishment, of receiving the "Word of God", the final output of inspiration, and the concluding personal testimony of Jesus Christ, "the Faithful Witness". And being, as everybody else ought to be, in a state of perfect acquiescence with the Holy Spirit "on the Lord's day", he heard the voice behind him commanding him to write and send the message to the church. John claims no superiority, and no exemptions. He was but an ordinary man, doing what any other ordinary man ought to have been doing under similar circumstances, when the summons came to him to produce the present work. Only for the fact that he had a profounder and more undiluted love for Jesus Christ, and a deeper insight into and a more intelli-

gent interest in the things of eternity, and a larger reservoir of grit and gumption, than we have, he was but a man like ourselves.

Now this man, this mere man, this common workaday man, heard, as he tells us, a voice, "as of a trumpet", behind him. It is never proper to press any word very far beyond its concededly probable implications, at least for argumentative purposes, but the direction indicated here and emphasized in the context is surely conspicuous enough to arrest attention. The voice of God came to John, as it comes to every one, by way of past experience. For many years he had been in the process of being equipped for the reception of this very message. By his character, by his trade, by his calling and occupation as a disciple and an apostle of the Nazarene, and by his manner of life, his soul had been so sensitized that it was capable at the proper moment of receiving the most delicate impressions. He had himself already passed through, at least incipiently, what he was about to transmit to his fellow men in the form of writing. That which was from the beginning, that which he had heard, that which he had seen with his eyes, that which he had beheld in vision, that which his hands had handled—that, embedded deeply in the very framework of his being, was what the Holy Spirit had at hand to begin on. With this within him, in miniature, as a groundwork, he was ready for larger visions on a grander scale. Inspiration never precludes experience and intelligence. It uses them, directs them, makes them inerrant. It was out from, up through the medium of, ninety years and more of rich experience that that mighty voice, on that lonely isle, came

to the consciousness of John. And so he tells us that he heard the voice "behind" him. What an honor it is to have behind us an experience which the Holy Ghost can utilize to advantage for the enlightenment of men!

At last, in verse twelve, we are confronted with the "apocalypse", the actual appearance, of Jesus Christ. How easy it is to overlook the tremendous eloquence of those two words—in Greek they are but two—"When I turned, I saw". When he turned, he looked into the countenance of the loving, omnipotent, glorified, reigning Redeemer. It takes a dozen lines or so to record what John would comprehend in the twinkling of an eye. The imagery is supplied from the appointments and the services of the temple. The Outer Court with its altar of atonement and its laver of regeneration is tacitly passed by. The sacrificial death, together with the application of its benefits to the soul by the omnipotent act of the Spirit, is thought of as a thing of the past, and is assumed. We are ushered right through the Outer Court into the Holy Place. The theme to be studied is the spiritual life of the church—its development, expansion, growth in grace, its sanctification. The golden candelabra make us conscious that we are in the vicinity of the table of "shewbread" and the "altar of incense". The church is being considered as a body of men and women who are feeding on "the bread of the Presence", and who through the intercessions of their great High Priest at the golden altar are being kept in constant communication with Him who sits within the veil upon the Mercy Seat, in order that they may become, by means of these provisions, the joyous, consistent, triumphant light-bearers of the

world. It is all in the context—the Son of man, in priestly attire, and girded for action, "in the midst of the candlesticks". There was no need that the shewbread should be symbolized, for the Son of man was there; He was that bread. There was no need that the golden altar should be symbolized, for the great High Priest, who had long ago been "made perfect" through suffering, was constantly presenting "the prayers of the saints", as the manner of His girding would indicate, not now at the altar of incense, but at the throne of God. It was the church, made up of sinful human beings, whose lives at the best are marred by imperfections without number, that had to be handled symbolically with a view to its completeness as an institution of light. It is the candelabrum, accordingly, with its import and functions, that we need to get a view of in its completeness. It was a magnificent piece of furniture. The one in the tabernacle was of pure beaten gold, and weighed, with its instruments, a talent, or about two hundred pounds, while the value of the material, to say nothing of the workmanship involved, was upward of twenty-five thousand dollars. In the temple there were ten of them. On this occasion, since the symbolism to be elaborated later demands it, the number is seven. In the midst of these splendidly transfigured pedestals of glorified gold, which are to furnish the world with the light it has to have, and which are evidently conceived of as constituting the circumference of a circle, even as the seven Churches lay roughly in a circle, the Son of man is seen standing in His infinitely adorable majesty. As He is in the centre of the circle the eyes of the entire church of the

living God may be turned to Him. He is girded for ministering, if indeed He is not in the act of ministering, at the throne of grace, to the end that he may present His people faultless before the presence of the Father's glory with exceeding joy. The hair of His head is white, for He is crowned with the immaculate wisdom of eternity. And yet there is no hint of infirmities due to age, for His eyes are as a "flame of fire", and can discern to the infinitesimalest shading "the thoughts and intents of the heart". His feet are like brass at white heat in a furnace, ready to tread down every semblance of ungodliness, wherever found, with inexorable justice. His voice, according to the theme on which it makes itself heard, is like the sound of many waters—terrible as the roar of an angry ocean, or gentle and fascinating as the happy "crystal rills" that

> "Come dancing down with tinkling feet from the
> sky-dividing hills".

In His right hand, the hand He uses in performing His wonderful works, He holds the "seven stars"—the composite, resplendent, supernal influence of the church as a whole, by the use of which He has purposed either to transform the world, or to justify its condemnation. What the symbol says is in substance this: "My people have believed in me their crucified and risen Lord and their great High Priest, and these bright and shining stars in the firmament of progress attest their faith, and vindicate their loyalty, and are held on high in order to illuminate the paths of righteousness for every coming age. With these radiant spots in the over-arching sky of human history as my 'messengers'

to declare the power of my own right hand I am setting forth to bring the tidings of redeeming love to a helpless world. The good name, the unexampled achievements, the inapproachable blessedness, of my rescued following are the implements I work with". Surely the inference is plain and unevadable, namely, that all who find a place in the church of Jesus Christ should purify themselves even as He is pure, to the end that there may be nothing to prevent their influence from shining as "the brightness of the firmament" and "as the stars for ever and ever". Otherwise their influence, could it be used at all, would serve but to blur the brightness of the "seven stars" and impair the implement in the hand of Christ.

Rivers of blood have been the result of the failure to apprehend the import of the next assertion in its connection with the statement about the "seven stars" in Christ's right hand. In His plans the Son of man has made provision to use the influence of the church to its uttermost, but never to resort to force, in the dissemination of the gospel. The weapon to be used in spreading the glad tidings of salvation is to be the spoken word, made effective by a consistent life. The picture is informative. *Out of the mouth* of the Son of man a sharp two-edged sword keeps going forth all the time, as much as to say that the continuous proclamation of the truth is what will bring peace on earth and good will among men. Islamism and the Inquisition are as far removed from the spirit of Christianity as hell is from heaven. Give it time and the truth will do the work wherever uttered. It is "quick and powerful", "living and active", "sharper than any two-edged sword",

"piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit", and ultimately it reaches the heart. The Word of God is the one aggressive instrument which the church has been authorized to use in the propagation of the Christian religion. Christ, holding the influence of good men upon His right hand and giving expression to the truth by the words of His mouth, is a representation which the church will do well to keep in unintermittent remembrance.

At length, turning his eyes away from the candelabra, and from the clothing of the glorious Person who stands in the midst of them, and from the appearance of His hair and His eyes and His feet, and from the music of His voice, and from the things that His right hand is doing and His lips are uttering, John looks into the meridian splendor of the Face itself. In it he sees the features of the Intercessor and Advocate, of the only wise Judge and inexorable Executive, of the appreciative and peaceable Workman, beaming with an exuberance of power, and suffused in light. It is the Transfiguration out-transfigured. The sight of his beloved Lord, "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders", is more than he can bear. He falls at His feet as though he were dead. Under the overawing sublimity of that Countenance his spirit disintegrates. He becomes utterly helpless. What a splendid face that Face must be! And what a joy it is to know that when the Lord Jesus shall appear to us who accept Him as our Saviour, we shall not only see Him as He is—as John saw Him, but shall actually be "like Him"!

No sooner is John overcome by the majesty, the intelligence, the strength and the beauty of the Face, however,

than he is reassured and comforted by the gentleness of the Hand. Have no fears, the action intimates, for the same right hand that holds aloft the seven stars has work for you. One wonders if John's fingers did not tremble so violently as to make his penmanship almost illegible as he traced those words upon the parchment—"He placed His right hand upon me". One wonders if John realized what a magnificent work that hand would do with his life from that moment onwards, and how it would hold his character forth in the firmament of grace as a star of encouragement and hope for fallen men in every future age. To feel the pressure of "the right hand of the Most High" and hear Him calling us to a place of special trust in His kingdom—will there ever be any ecstasy to compare with that, anywhere? The moment that hand is laid upon us all things are ours; we have no need to be troubled or disconcerted; it is for us to rise instantly and look the Christ in the eye. Not to John alone, but to every one who is willing to enter the service of the Son of God with John's unreservedness, comes the voice that says, "Fear not, I am the First and the Last". And coming from whom it does, what does it not bring with it? Jesus Christ is the Living One, who has life in Himself. He entered the domains of Death, and passed through the Unseen World into Paradise. He returned from Paradise and was talking with John. He had made the rounds. With no realm of existence was He unfamiliar. From His lips, accordingly, "fear not" has an infinite meaning. It gives us the courage to laugh at death, for in the eyes of the Lord the death of His saints is a matter of moment. Death has to await its orders, and, ordered

by Him, it cannot come amiss. To be "the First and the Last" is to be able to say, "A whole I planned; trust God: see all, nor be afraid".

How much is packed in small corners in the closing verses of this chapter! Every word is freighted with significance. Not a conjunction, not a preposition, not a tense can be passed over unappreciatively without positive loss. First, we are informed, for one thing, by the tenses used, that John had seen the vision in all its fullness before he ever sat down to write at all. As an experience it belonged to the past. It is to be no empty treasure-house from which his supplies are to be drawn. And yet he is not to break away from contemporaneous history. Whatever he writes must take its rise from, and find its anchorage in, the things that are weaving themselves into an historical fabric under his very eyes at the moment. By placing everyday facts and occurrences under the miscroscope of historical science, and noting them in their naked reality, and in their ethical implications, and in their inescapable consequences, he is to furnish himself with the key for unlocking the future. History is not disconnected. Things do not happen one after another merely, but one because of another. There is an underlying unity in all that transpires. And hence it is that to read one epoch accurately is to become a master in a broad and general way of all epochs. John's instruction, accordingly, amounts to this: Write, then, the things which you saw, even the things that are transpiring now, and the things that are about to transpire in connection with, in unbroken continuity with, as of a single piece with, the things that are happening daily. John means that his

readers shall proceed with the perusal of this book untrammelled by chronological considerations. And surely two millenniums of uninterrupted failure in this regard ought to be enough to convince almost any mind that expositions of the Apocalypse based on chronological contrivances, however deftly handled, are, to say the least, precarious. Date-debris is mountainous. Fixing dates has been in the balances for nineteen hundred years and has invariably been found wanting. Why prolong the process—especially when John at the very outset has been so careful to give us a different clue?

The Introduction closes with a word about "the mystery", the thing to be explained, as regards the "seven stars", and about the "seven golden candlesticks". The explanation accentuates the distinction between the Churches and the "angels" of the Churches. The church as an actuality, sad to say, has its scribes, and Pharisees, and Nicolaitans, and paramours of Jezebel, and various other types of hypocrites. Not with these it is that Christ will work. The instrument in His hand must be untarnished. He will work with nothing but the unsullied influence of the church. What a pity then, that it should contain any but the best! What a pity that any part of its membership should ever be satisfied with anything but whole-hearted loyalty and devotedness! If men who have named the name of Christ would only stop to think what a vast work our ascended Lord could accomplish through their lives in case they would give themselves body, soul and spirit to the furtherance of His cause, how could they ever be contented, even for a moment, with anything less absorbing and exalted than

the ideal set before the world so clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"? Men cannot be sinless, it is true, but they can be genuine. It is genuine Christianity, out and out Christianity, that Christ holds in His right hand. The "seven stars" are the effulgence of the church at its perfection. They are the "angels" of the church, the "shining ones" that go out from it as its impalpable "messengers"—in a word, the church itself thought of as containing none in its membership except those whose "names are written in heaven". The "seven stars" are the light in the sky, whereas the "seven golden candlesticks" are the church which sheds the light—the church, however, as it actually exists at any given time in the annals of history. What John is anxious to effect is a pure church, of which even Christ need never be ashamed.

The present work, then, is to be a book of symbols. It is to be a book from the hand of one who is qualified by experience to produce it. It is to be a book which takes its start from existing facts, unfolding them in their essence and inner relationships with such a degree of thoroughness and accuracy as to furnish the reader with an epitomized philosophy of history. It is to be a book that will show that the hope of the world lies latent in the church, and that the church can be held in the right hand of the world's Redeemer only in so far as its membership sets itself sincerely to the task of measuring up to the standard of perfection in Jesus Christ. And finally, it is to be the book in which the Word of God is to reach its completed form—an event of such momentous import in its bearing on the welfare of

mankind as to have justified the reappearance of Jesus Christ in the flesh, in order that in the most impressive manner He might, as it were with His own fingers, place the divine imprimatur on the Scriptures as a whole, and write at the foot of the last page of the Perfected Book the same declaration that marked the triumph of Calvary—"It is finished".

CHAPTER III

PREFATORY TO LECTURE II

AS over against the unverifiable assumptions of Dr. Charles, in the *International Critical Commentary*, to wit, that the seven epistles were written "at a much earlier date than the book as a whole", and were "actually sent out to their respective Churches" in a more primitive form, and were finally "re-edited" by insertions and additions that "in some degree brought them into harmony with the rest of the book", the remark in *Meyer*—that they were "skilfully planned and forcibly elaborated according to a scheme"—is sane and refreshing. Given a small allowance of faulty exegesis to be pursued in the interests of an hypothesis, and it is amazing at times what an author can do. On the face of it the book is a unit, and written, as we say, in a single heat. Ramsay: John "is here writing a series of letters on a uniform plan, under the spur of a single impulse; and it is clearly intended that the Seven Churches should be understood as in a way summing up the whole Province. That could only be the case if each was in some way representative of a small group of Churches, so that the whole seven taken together represented and summed up the entire Province. . . . These seven representative Churches stand for the Church of the Province; and the Church of the Province, in its turn, stands for the entire church of Christ".

1. Many inscriptions refer to Ephesus as **"the first and greatest metropolis of Asia"**—ἡ πρώτη καὶ μεγίστη μετρόπολις

τῆς Ἀσίας, and Strabo calls it **the greatest emporium of Asia west of the Taurus**— ἐμπόριον οὖσα μέγιστον τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν τὴν ἐντὸς τοῦ Ταύρου. Its government was administered by the Roman Senate through the agency of the Proconsul. It was a surpassingly important centre, civically, commercially, and religiously. Charles: it was "the great trade route from the Euphrates by way of Colossae and Laodicea, a second from Galatia *via* Sardis, while a third came up from the south from the Maeander valley". Ramsay displays two significant coins. One of them "shows a Roman war-vessel, propelled by oars, not sails, lightly built, active and independent of winds. The legend **"First Landing"** (Α′ κατάπλους) marks it as a ship that conveys the Proconsul to his landing-place in Ephesus". The other is a merchant ship, "a ship under sail", to indicate "the maritime trade that frequented Ephesus". Swete: "Ephesus was not less conspicuous as a centre of religious life. It was proud to be known as **Warden** (νεωκόρος) of the Temple of Artemis, a shrine of world-wide reputation (Acts 19:27, 35). Further it was the headquarters of the magical arts which at this time were widely practiced in Asia Minor (cf. Acts 19:19); the Ἐφέσια γράμματα were famous everywhere. The city was a hotbed of cults and superstitions, a meeting-place of East and West, where Greeks, Romans and Asiatics jostled one another in the streets". Also in another connection: "In the Ephesian calendar the month of the spring equinox was named after **Artemis** (ὁ Ἀρτεμισιών), and during that month the city celebrated a **yearly festival** in honor of the goddess (τὰ Ἀρτεμίσια). On great festivals a sacred **carriage** (ἡ ἱερὰ ἁπήνη)

carried the image of Artemis through the streets of the city". Amid such conditions and surroundings it is little wonder that the effort of Christians to maintain their integrity in Ephesus is described as **"toil"** (κόπος).

The title interlaces with the letter. The comment of Charles, that "this clause has no organic connection with the letter to the Church in Ephesus", is singularly superficial. As Ephesus was Asia in miniature, so it is here regarded as the church in epitome. Swete: "To the Church in Ephesus, the mother of the Churches of Asia, the Lord writes under titles which express His relation to the Churches generally. As Ephesus represented the Province (cf. Ἀσία ἡ Ἔφεσος cited by Ramsay, *Letters*, p. 238), so the Ephesian Church stands here for the seven. Yet the message shows the special need which the Ephesian Church had both of a firm grasp and a watchful safeguarding". Beckwith: "The epithet is appropriate here, but in all the other epistles as well. It stands here, not with sole reference to the contents of this epistle, but is chosen apparently, because this epistle holds an introductory place at the beginning of the whole series of the epistles, which in the mind of the writer form a connected unit". There is a certain fundamentalness in this epistle which the others do not have. They have the effect of being introduced for the purpose of rounding this one out. In this one a fine force of laborers is already at work on the contract of keeping the channel open to the broad deep sea of divine love and everlasting blessedness—a contract to which Ephesus has a no more pressing call than have all the rest, but which the physical conditions at Ephesus are peculiarly

adapted to set forth illustratively, seeing that the spiritual conditions are of a similar cast. The great Contractor walking about among His laborers inspecting all their works, and holding aloft in His right hand for the enlightenment of the world every commendable thing that they have been enabled to do for His cause—than this what preface could be more superlatively fitting?

Between κρατῶν and ἔχων the distinction is not primarily one of force, but rather of purpose or aim. In 1:16 the Son of man **holds** (ἔχων) the seven stars **'in the palm of'** (ἐν), or as in v. 20 **'upon the palm of'** (ἐπί), His right hand. There, however, the purpose is simply to describe what was exhibited, and for descriptive purposes the appropriate word is ἔχων. Here there is a manifest advance in the thought. The Son of man has actually entered upon His work of inspection. He has tightened His grasp, as κρατῶν attests, has closed His hand vigorously upon the seven stars, *with a view to* putting their radiance to immediate use in the evangelization of the world. There is a delicate discrimination displayed by our author in the use of these two words, a discrimination which is discernible every time he makes a choice between them, though there are times when the distinction may be more easily felt than described.

2. Concerning οἶδα (**I know**), Swete remarks: "The Apocalypse does not use γινώσκω of Christ; οἶδα emphasizes better the absolute clearness of mental vision which photographs all the facts of life as they pass". The whole picturesque setting, on the plan of which the entire letter is constructed, has been furnished for us at the outset by that little word ἔργα (**works**). Professor Benndorf, quoted by

Ramsay, shows that the history of Ephesus "was determined by its original situation on the sea-shore and its eagerness to retain its character as a harbor in spite of the changes of nature, which left it far from the sea". The Cayster's deposits kept the city busy. Down at the docks there was no end of dredging and construction work. In A.D. 65 Nero placed the energy of the Empire behind the extensive engineering operations that were necessary to keep a channel open to "the first landing-place" of Asia. To keep that harbor clear was an enormous contract. When Christ therefore said to the Ephesian Church, "I know thy contract", His language would be luminous. Moreover, this view invigorates the rest of the sentence. As against Swete, Beckwith, Charles, et al., who regard it as epexegetical, the following καὶ must now be allotted its ordinary copulative sense—I know the task, the contract, which you have undertaken, the vast undone which it lies in your heart and mind to accomplish, **and** I know the toil and perseverance as well which you have shown in your efforts to fulfil that contract. Copulative also is the καί before ὅτι. The language sets before us four distinct ideas. The first stands in a class by itself, for it refers to the broad comprehensive "contract" considered in its entirety. This "contract" may be called either **the Lord's** (τῷ ἔργῳ τοῦ Κυρίου) as in I Cor. 15:58, or the **church's** (σοῦ) as here, for the Lord requires the church to take it from His hands and make it its own. Once the church has assumed the task, however, a new set of circumstances confronts it. First, it must get to work; it must enter gladly into an era of illimitable "toil"; it must bend its last energies to the utter-

most to spread the Good Tidings of its crucified, risen and ascended Saviour; in a word, it must claim its field and build its plant. Then it must steel itself against seasons of depression, when reverses come, when disappointments pile up, when obstacles seem to be insurmountable, when nothing but perseverance and "patient endurance" will save the day; it must have faith enough to tide it through the dark hour and keep the plant from "closing down". And finally, it must get rid of the refuse, must keep the plant clean and efficient and in good working order. Christ, then, "knew" how the Church of Ephesus was toiling, and holding out steadfastly against tremendous odds, and was keeping itself pure. And this programme, which the Ephesian Church followed in fulfilling its contract, is recommended to the seven Churches (v. 7), and through them to the church universal. On the words κόπος (**toil**), and ὑπομονή (**endurance**), Düsterdieck, in *Meyer*, remarks: "The κόπος, together with the ὑπομονή, refers to all wherein believers fulfil their peculiar holy task with divine and spiritual power and endurance,—a work which, in its most manifold forms, is always combined with hardship (κόπος), and therefore cannot be fulfilled without ὑπομονή, as this is essentially and necessarily conditioned by the antagonism between the kingdom of Christ and the world". The letter to the Ephesian Church, therefore, is written in such a way as to body forth the vast "contract", together with all that it involves, which has been allotted to the Christian church, and which the Christian church has been charged with the responsibility of putting through. As in Mk. 9:22 and Lk. 16:2 δύνῃ is used for δύνασαι; note the force of the present—**you are**

not able now, even yet, although you *have* lost your "first love". On this clause Swete remarks: "Another good thing which has not escaped the eye of Christ. The ὑπομονή of the Ephesians did not imply indifference to sin; they could not bear the company of bad men". Nowadays especially this fact ought to be emphasized. It is no credit to the church to **"tolerate"** (βαστάσαι), **carry as a dead weight** in its membership, such as claim to be Christians, but are not, and whose profession accordingly is but a lie; for wicked members are the heaviest burden the church has to carry. It is worth while to study in this connection Ps. 26:1–7. The man who hates "the assembly of evil-doers" and "will not sit with the wicked" is the man, and the only man, who "can make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard" and publish the "wondrous works"—set forward the *wondrous contract*—of Jehovah in the world. Cf. also Ps. 139:21–24; Rom. 12:9; Phil. 3:2; II John 10, 11; Rev. 22:15. This from Carlyle is to the point, and refreshing: "We blame Knox for his intolerance. Well, surely it is good that each of us be as tolerant as possible. Yet, at bottom, after all the talk there is and has been about it, what is tolerance? Tolerance has to tolerate the *un*essential; and to see well what that is. Tolerance has to be noble, measured, just in its very wrath, when it can tolerate no longer. But, on the whole, we are not here altogether to tolerate! We are here to resist, to control and vanquish withal. We do not 'tolerate' falsehoods, thieveries, iniquities, when they fasten on us; we say to them, Thou art false, thou art not tolerable! We are here to extinguish falsehoods, and put an end to them, in some way!"

3, 4. In these verses everything hinges on the tenses. A slight accentuation in their rendering will disclose their force—Steadfast endurance **you have now** (ἔχεις) as a present possession; your burdens **you did at one time bear** ἐβάστασας for my name's sake; **you have been toiling for a long time and are toilng yet** (κεκοπίακες) **without weariness.** That ominous aorist ἐβάστασας tells the tale. What lies implicit in it is caught up in ἀλλά, (**but**), the force of which may be felt by reproducing it thus—Nor did I use that little aorist inadvertently; I have it against you. Furthermore, in support of this view, the resumption of the aorist in ἀφῆκες (**you did,** at some specific though unmentioned time, **abandon**), would seem to be decisive. I have it against you, that you abandoned the love which you had at the first, that love, namely, which incited you then to bear your burdens διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου (**for my name's sake**). It is so hard for us to bear burdens patiently for any considerable length of time without coming to feel, though we might be slow to admit it, that in some minor degree at least we are beginning to merit the grace or favor of God. At such a moment, however, we commence to think of *our own name* and to endure for *our own sake.* It is a perilous attitude to assume, and has within it the germ of infinitely calamitous consequences. The "love" referred to here is the love that discriminates between right and wrong in moral motives; cf. Ps. 45:7 (of Christ Himself); also I Cor. 13:6 and Rom. 12:9.

5. Here again it is the tenses that demand attention. There are a present, a perfect and two aorists, each of which, we must assume, was used designedly. **Remember con-**

tinuously (μνημόνευε) the high plane from which **you have fallen** (πέπτωκες), and,—as the perfect implies,—the low plane as well, which, as a consequence of that fall, you are still continuing to occupy: get as much as this into your mind as a permanent possession. Then **repent, once for all,** (μετανόησον), and **adopt, once for all,** (ποίησον), the plan of operations which you followed at the first, before you ceased to work solely "*for my name's sake*". As the present and perfect of v. 3, and the present in μισεῖς (**you hate**), of v. 6, indicate, there had been no break whatsoever in the work *in so far as diligent application and toiling were concerned.* It was the system that had suffered change. They had altered the "contract" so as to bring it about that they were working for themselves. "Do the first works", then, means—Let there be a definite, instantaneous, irrevocable resumption of the first plan, so that the labor which you are expending, and have been expending right along, may not be labor expended in vain; or—to revert once more to the figure in the moulds of which the thoughts are running—so that the debris you are removing from the harbor may not be dumped again into the current of the Cayster. Alford: "*And repent* (quickly and effectually, aor.) *and do the first works* (those works which sprung from thy first love: those resume)." **"Otherwise"** (εἰ δὲ μή) refers equally to all three of the preceding imperatives.

In what follows the picture is perfect. The present in ἔρχομαι (**I am coming**) is superlatively apt. Even at that moment the river was depositing silt *to the disadvantage of* the city. So Christ, at the very instant of His appearance to John, and of John's writing, and of the letter's first

perusal, was coming (σοί is a *dativus incommodi*) to the disadvantage of the Ephesian Church, was coming just as certainly, and silently, and unceasingly, and unobtrusively as the sediments of the Cayster kept coming into the harbor. Into the life of the Christian, who lapses into working for himself instead of for his Lord, Christ begins to come instantaneously in the way of piling up the judicial consequences that are bound to follow. There are but two alternatives; either there must be redoubled dredging—that repentance, namely, that will get the life back to "first works", to toiling on the basis of proper moral motives; or else the life, as a light-bearer, must be moved out of its place. "Κινεῖν (cf. 6:14) is preferred to ἀφαιρεῖν", says Swete, "perhaps as indicating deliberation and judicial calmness; there would be no sudden uprooting as in anger, but a movement which would end in the loss of the place that the Church had been called to fill; unless there came a change for the better, the first of the seven lamps of Asia must disappear". It may further be said, however, that had ἀφαιρήσω been used, it would have allowed us to lose sight of the river, and the landscape, and the city receding in the distance; but with the "I will move" of κινήσω we are kept in touch with the energy of motion, with the actual indwelling energy of the object under consideration, with the kinetic activity, so to speak, of the Cayster; every syllable is redolent with the calmness and the certainty of science. Charles, wholly without evidence, decides that ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς (if, as a simple past event, **you shall not have repented** once for all), "must be excised as an intrusion", since he regards it as "a weaker repetition of εἰ δὲ μή".

On the contrary, as it stands, it is a delicate intimation of Christ's reluctance to act in such a way; is as though He were to have said, "Of course, as you know, and as I wish to remind you once more, nothing in the world except your failure to change your mental, moral and spiritual attitude could ever cause me to remove you out of your place". If we do the Greek the justice of according it its native force and power, many expressions which seem on the surface to be but "vain repetitions" will be found to be instinct with significance and beauty. As I sit and meditate on this appended clause, I seem to hear Christ saying, "Oh, I cannot say as much as I have said without reverting once more to the only way out!"

6. Yet (ἀλλά) this you still have as a present possession. Swete says, that "this second ἀλλά modifies the ἀλλά of v. 4", and Charles remarks that "the Seer modifies the severe criticism in 4-5 by bringing forward the redeeming characteristic in the Ephesian Church". But "modifies" is not the word. Christ "modifies" nothing. He never said anything He had to modify. The sixth verse is simply the statement of an additional fact. The second ἀλλά, as was doubtless intended, recalls the first, but with the purpose of indicating the limited area within which the aforesaid defect was as yet confined. The Ephesian Christians still hated deeds of abomination and impurity, hated them heartily, hated them as Christ hated them, even though their protracted endurance of hardships had begun to wear in their own estimation a certain tinge, more or less marked, of the meritorious. And who is not able to verify this state of affairs from his own experience? A Christian, to

be a Christian at all, must hate vileness and obscenity, but where is the Christian who does not find himself all too often falling from grace, as Paul uses that phrase; falling away, that is, from the high ground of unmerited favor to the low ground of "good works"—felicitating himself, for example, on his successes, or on his superiority in some field of achievement, when he should be regarding everything he is possessed of, both in its beginnings and in its minutest increments, as being a specific gift from God; forgetting for the time being that the glory of it all, whatever glory there may be in it, belongs solely to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of his soul? This is a fatal attitude, and it must be crucified mercilessly, but it is an attitude which a man may have at times and still be a Christian. It is not to "modify" anything that has been said, therefore, it is not to mitigate its severity or to lessen its force, that the statement about the Nicolaitans has been introduced, but simply in the interests of accuracy. A man may hate Nicolaitans thoroughly, and thus in so far be Christlike (ἃ κἀγὼ μισῶ), but even so his attitude in this other respect may not be wholly commendable in the sight of God. Who the Nicolaitans were and what they held will be a matter of inquiry farther on.

7. According to this verse it is the "Spirit" who indites the letter. For the change in person various explanations have been offered. The obvious solution, however, is that what Christ, in person, at the moment of His appearance, had said to John, would be, when John under the influence of the Holy Ghost would commit it to writing, what the Spirit would say to the church universal for all after time.

The Apocalypse is inspired in no different sense from that in which the other books of the Bible are inspired, and therefore, as in all the rest, so in this, it is the Spirit that speaks to the church. Christ *in revealing* was in no wise usurping the functions of the Spirit *in inspiring*. Specially to be noted is the particularity both of ὁ ἔχων οὖς (**he that has an ear**), and of τῷ νικῶντι (**to him that overcomes**). No matter how vast the assemblage may be Christ never loses sight of the one in the multitude. Swete: "At the end of each of these instructions ὁ ἔχων οὖς is an individualizing note, calling upon each of the hearers of the book (1:3) to appropriate the warnings and promises addressed to the Churches."

"To him that overcomes". Charles says that "in our author ὁ νικῶν=ὁ νενικηκώς". Why, then, did not John write τῷ νενικηκότι? The word was right there at his hand. Surely he could have used it had he cared to. Swete, appreciating the significance of the text as it stands, says, "(It is) not τῷ νικήσαντι or τῷ νενικηκότι. The present participle here is timeless". Beckwith says it is "to be understood of final victory over all spiritual foes". But why "final" more than present? The victory of which Christ is speaking is not to be thought of as a spectacular finish to a common, or even to an extraordinary, life, but rather as a continuous unbrokenly triumphant experience of everyday living. Düsterdieck remarks that νικᾶν "designates nothing else than the faithful perseverance of believers, as maintained in the struggle with all godless and antichristian powers". With this view Charles seems, yet only seems, to agree, when he says, "The word νικᾶν implies that the

Christian life is a warfare from which there is no discharge, but it is a warfare, our author teaches, in which even the feeblest saint can prove victorious". In reality, with Beckwith and others, he confines the thought to "final victory", for he follows up the foregoing sentence immediately by saying, "But the word νικᾶν is not used in our author of every Christian, but only of the martyr who, though apparently overcome in that he had to lay down his life, yet was in very truth the one who overcame, 'as I also have overcome', saith Christ, 3:21 (cf. John 16:33)". But while the aorist in 3:21 undoubtedly refers to the final act of triumph when Jesus died as a martyr on the cross, to what does the perfect in John 16:33 refer? Evidently He *had overcome* before He came to the cross. Indeed, the perfect implies that He had been overcoming all along and was at the moment enjoying the fruits of victory. He was a victor three times in the desert; He was a victor when they planned to "take Him by force" and "make Him a King"; He was a victor when Peter tried to persuade Him to evade the crucifixion; He was a victor in the Garden; He was a victor when they dared Him to come down from the cross; He was a victor in the hour and article of death; with Him "*overcoming*" *was a habit.* What was a habit with Him should be a habit with everybody. John used the perfect where the perfect was what was needed to convey the suitable shade of thought (John 16:33). He uses the aorist (3:21) where nothing but the aorist can express what he wants to say. Why not give him the credit of using the present, as he uses it invariably in the sayings in question, with the same degree of intelligence? For my part I cannot see the

propriety of meddling with the tenses of a writer whose instinct in choosing the terms that will express his meaning tellingly is phenomenal.

Of αὐτῷ (**to him**), Alford says, "The personal pronoun is repeated both idiomatically and for emphasis". The expression is Hebraistic, but the Hebraism, let it be noted, is such as would argue that the writer was a perfect master of both languages. We must not overlook or minimize the fact that it is one thing to have to listen to a foreigner weaving strange idioms into our mother tongue while he is in the process of learning the language, but quite another thing to hear the same person perhaps, after he has become an adept, really enriching our tongue by introducing certain idiomatic expressions from his own mother tongue, which will serve to furnish us with the means of arriving at new shades of thought or of adorning our thoughts with an added piquancy and beauty. Not every importation is a blunder; it may be a gem. In the present instance this in effect is what we have: To him who keeps gaining moral and spiritual victories, moment by moment, every day of his life—to him, and to nobody else, will I grant the privilege of eating of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. And how true this is to experience! To gain moral and spiritual victories for Christ's sake is bliss; never to have gained such victories is not to know what bliss is. The "tree of life" was in the Garden of Eden; that is to say, it was on earth. Its fruits were available for the present life. Paradise, it is true, may be thought of as belonging to the heavenly world; in a manner it does, but not exclusively; if we choose to think of it in this way, we must always re-

member that "its branches hang over the wall". The "tree of life" is a heavenly plant on earthly soil, but the soil on which it grows is hallowed ground, as hallowed as heaven is. The man who eats of its fruits is in heaven, no matter where he may be—on this side of death or on the other. The toilers of Ephesus, as long as for Christ's sake they were agonizing to spread the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, and were patiently living down their discouragements and disappointments by steadfast endurance, and were tasking their powers to keep the wolves out of the flock, were eating "of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God". They were being sustained by an inner unspeakable joy which no privation could affect—unless, indeed, it might serve to deepen it and link it more firmly with the raptures of eternity. The man who does not eat of "the tree of life" here will never eat of it. Absolute Christianity and the absolute joy of it go hand in hand and are inseparable. Thanks be to God that we do not need to wait until we are in heaven to know what blessedness is!

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write tersely as follows. These things says He who, that He may make use of their light, holds the seven stars aloft in the grasp of His right hand, and who keeps walking around continuously within the circuit of the seven golden candlesticks: "I know the work you have planned, the scope and the magnitude of the operations you have undertaken, and the toil as well which you have expended and the perseverance you have shown in your efforts to bring your plans and

undertakings to a successful issue, and I know how you are not able to put up with wicked men, and how you tried those who keep protesting that they are apostles and are not, and how you showed them up to be but a set of deceivers. Yes, I know that you still have the grace of perseverance, and that you did bear up under heavy burdens for my name's sake, and that you have been toiling all along without any manifestation of weariness (and indeed are toiling that way yet), but I have it against you none the less that at a given time (I will not mention when) you left behind you that love with which you started out so nobly at the first—the love, that is to say, which kept you toiling and bearing burdens solely for my name's sake. It is a backward step which indicates a most deplorable defect in character. There is but one thing to do. Let that perfect ideal which you had at the first, and from which you have fallen away, be re-established and cherished in your memory as the one and only acceptable ideal for Christian living, and by one instantaneous act change your mind radically, so as to make your motives measure up with the divine standard, adopting, in a word, the first programme, immediately and once for all, in all its fulness and details. Otherwise, I propose to come, right along, while your history lasts, to your ever multiplying disadvantage. I will begin at once to move, and will keep steadily on moving, your light-bearing candlestick out of its place—always, of course, as I have intimated, with the proviso that at my times of visitation I shall have found that you have not repented. For what you still retain I commend you. It is indeed a comfort to reflect that you

have not fallen away so far but that you hate the defective programme of the Nicolaitans in common with me. He that has an inclination to listen, let him hear what the Holy Spirit, when under His inspiration this message shall have been committed to writing, has to say to the church as a whole. It is no easy task to bear up uncomplainingly under hardship for my name's sake; it takes courage and constancy to do it; but to him that gains the victory over every evil tendency as it comes along I will give an inner sense of satisfaction which will more than overbalance the encountered hardships—nothing less, that is to say, than the right to eat daily, even while the tribulations are being endured, of the fruit of the tree of life which has its roots in the Garden of God.

Chapter two, verses 1–7.

CHAPTER IV

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS

A Message Concerning the Contract of the Christian Church

AT the time when the Apocalypse was penned Asia Minor had been a Roman Province for more than two hundred years. It was the wealthiest region of the Empire. Its cities were marvels of beauty. Each was determined to excel all the others. Their love of superiority knew no bounds. "Municipal pride", says Ramsay, "expressed itself in outward show, partly in the healthier direction of improving and beautifying the cities, partly in the vainglorious invention of names and titles. In every Province and district there was keen competition for the title first of the Province or the district. Every city which could pretend to the first place in respect of any qualification called itself 'first', and roused the jealousy of other cities which counted themselves equally good. Smyrna was 'first of Asia in size and beauty', Ephesus first of Asia as the landing-place of every Roman official, Pergamum first as the official capital, and Sardis boldly styled itself 'first metropolis of Asia, of Lydia, of Hellenism'." Each city was resolved to have a name that was above every name. It thought of itself as being "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth". For the "name's sake" of their city the citizens of these competing municipalities were ready to give freely of their means, of their time, of their

toil, and were willing to bear patiently almost any burden that might have to be placed upon their shoulders. Ephesus, pluming herself on the honor and renown that were hers through the event, was proud and never slow to say, "The agent of the mightiest sovereign on earth comes into Asia by way of my harbor; this is my rejoicing—

'my crown about my brows,
A name forever'."

And what, after all, from their point of view, could have been more signally glorious than just the fact that Ephesus was the landing-place for the gracious and august Proconsul who came to their harbor commissioned with the power of the Roman Senate? That venerable and illustrious body of men held the Province of Asia in the very highest esteem, and allowed nothing to stand in the way of providing for its continuous welfare; so that the approaching Proconsul was always welcomed by the entire populace within his alloted domains as the herald of glad tidings and the accredited messenger of peace and good will. Ephesus was the spot where the Majesty of Rome first set foot on the soil of the Province.

In the life of Ephesus, however, the harbor was the thing, and everybody knew it. As long as a passage-way could be kept open to the sea Ephesus would be able to hold the coveted distinction of being the "first landing-place of Asia". But that was by no means an easy thing to do. Ominous changes kept persistently taking place in the contour of the coast. Eleven hundred years before John's day the first Ephesus, at that time but a little Ionian vil-

lage, nestled near the base of the mountain not far from what was then the mouth of the Cayster. It looked out upon a broad and smiling gulf from the heart of which a verdurous island rose. The merry wavelets touched the mountains, refreshing the fringing forests on their wooded foothills, and affording the happy growing hamlet the advantage of being a seaport town. But the grim Cayster, bounding forth from the grasp of the mountains, never faltered, never paused, never ceased to pour its fateful contributions into the basin of the lake. Inch by inch the silting process made its inroads, and the gulf receded. We may well believe that the shrewd Ionians spent many a weary hour dredging out a channel to preserve themselves a harborage and keep their city on the coast. But at last they had to yield. The gulf was driven back by the increasing sediments. The wide watery expanse became a marshland, which changed in time to a dreary wind-swept plain, overgrown with reeds. By the action of the river the ancient city had been 'moved out of its place'.

Accordingly, the only thing to do was to find another site in touch with the sea, and build another city. And that was what was done. The new city was built in fine proportion on a splendid scale. Its harbor was said to have been a masterpiece of workmanship. It was called the gate-way of the Province, and it was worthy of the name. What a pity, then, it would be, and what a mortification to the pride of its citizens, if the unslumbering Cayster were to creep in once more, like a thief in the night, and rob the "first landing-place" of its reason for existence! Yet that was precisely what the Cayster was doing. Hour

by hour, without haste and without delay, it was quietly silting up the diminishing gulf. It was choking the channel. It was menacing the harbor. What it had done for the first Ephesus it was always on the point of doing for the second. It was continually threatening to sign the death-warrant of the city by 'moving it out of its place'.

The first systematic and adequate undertaking to neutralize the Cayster's depredations dates from the second century before Christ. The Pergamenian kings instituted extensive engineering operations to keep the harbor open. The interest and the influence of the royal palace, the resources of the wealthy, the services and contributions of the common people, the genius of the artisans and the labors of the workmen were behind the enterprise. Considering the era and the appliances it was a gigantic contract; but at length by 'toil', and 'perseverance', and 'burden-bearing', the task had been completed in keeping with the honor of the city's name. The "first works" at dredging had been accomplished with notable success—were of such a character, in fact, as to give Ephesus a lease of two full centuries longer on the sea-coast.

But the Cayster still kept working. In the days of Augustus and Tiberias and their immediate successors the channel had become so full of sediment once more as to endanger navigation. It was becoming increasingly obvious day by day that if Ephesus were to be kept in communication with the sea, and by the sea with Rome, something radical would have to be done. Committees might sit and talk learnedly by the hour about the Cayster's deposits, fine resolutions by the hundreds might be passed

by the citizens in their club rooms, the populace with one accord might rush to the theatre to hold indignation meetings, but the river kept serenely on, bringing its pebbles and its sand and leaving them in the harbor. Finally, in the reign of Nero, the Empire wakened up. It grasped the gravity of the situation. It 'repented' of its indolence, and resolved to follow the example of the Pergamenian kings and "do the first works". And so for a second time in its history this New Ephesus was to be spared the chagrin of being 'moved out of its place'.

It was an elaborate contract, and since the city's good name was involved we may well believe that the men of Ephesus entered into the work with spirit and determination and whole-heartedness. We can easily see it all with the mind's eye—the digging, the excavating, the transportation of materials, the bearing of burdens, the hoisting, the dredging; the construction of wharfs and quays for the landing and loading of merchandise; common laborers busy in all directions, reeking with sweat, bespattered with mire; men under sentence for crime kept to their tasks by merciless overseers, underfed, overworked, toiling without compensation and unsupported even by the feeling that their labors were appreciated. In those days as well as in our own such scenes were common. Nor were they unnoted; in fact, they were not unsung. Virgil in measured verse sets before us what might almost be regarded as a counterpart of the enterprise at Ephesus. Aeneas, he tells us, makes his way to the crest of a hill overlooking Carthage, that he may survey the activities of Agenor's city. How great is his astonishment when he sees that

huge mass of stately buildings where formerly but lowly cottages had stood! He marvels, we are told, at the size and beauty of the city's gates, at the din and uproar of the traffic, at the way the streets are paved. He can see the ardent Tyrians in companies working heartily, with might and main, extending walls, building towers, rolling massive blocks of stone to their places with their hands, marking spots for private dwellings, digging firm foundations for legislative halls and courts of justice, constructing harbors, excavating sites for lofty theatres, hewing mighty columns from the quarries to be the ornaments of edifices even more palatial for which the ground as yet had not been broken. It was an enterprise, says Virgil, that suggested the industry of bees whose absorbing objective is the making of honey. It reminded him of the swarming seasons, when the bees instinctively divide themselves into efficient groups; of the vengeance they take on drones that are only in the way; of the incessant flights of willing workers to the far off sources of supply; and of the spirit of co-operation through it all, when these outgoing laborers are met on their return by the toilers at home who are always ready to help them unload their precious cargoes.

Now the Apocalypse, it is true, was not written until thirty-two years after the contract of dredging the harbor at Ephesus had been approved by Nero. However, with the tools and apparatus then in use, it would doubtless take no fewer than five years, and perhaps even as many as ten, to accomplish the task; so that John in all probability was an inhabitant of Ephesus for several years before the undertaking was finally completed; or, if not before,

at least so shortly afterwards as to hear it referred to and talked about continually as the greatest engineering achievement of the age; for if there was anything in Ephesus in those days that was not "excluded", it was "boasting". Furthermore it is more than likely that it had at last begun to dawn upon the authorities, both Imperial and municipal, that every period of relaxation in the matter of dredging had to be followed of necessity by seasons of redoubled energy and effort, and that on that account it would never be wise to discontinue the process altogether, or even for any great length of time at a stretch. In a word, the dredging contract was the one thing which it would have been fatal to forget, the one thing for which Ephesus could ill afford to make either irregular or inadequate appropriations.

As supplying an illustration of the contract of the Christian church in the world, therefore, no other city of Asia Minor could possibly have been so suitable. The essential conception of the regenerate life and its growth in grace is interwoven into the very fabric of the history of Ephesus.

There was a time when the inhabitants of Ephesus were wholly out of touch with the work of advancing the spiritual welfare of the human race. They were Gentiles, as Paul tells us, "who walked according to the course of this world", and who were actuated in consequence by no higher aim than to fulfil "the desires of the flesh and of the mind", and were therefore "by nature the children of wrath even as others". The fall had removed them, in common with all the rest of mankind, 'out of their place'—

out of the place, that is, which man, as originally created in the image of God, had been equipped to occupy and adorn. Their condition "by nature" accordingly was but such as could remind them 'whence they had fallen', and show them how far the accumulating debris of a sinful heart could keep them removed from the harbor that stands on the shore of the deep untroubled sea of divine compassion and constitutes the first landing-place of Him who comes from the courts of heaven commissioned to bring peace to the souls and value to the lives of all who are willing to be ranked under the aegis of His sovereign power and infinite love.

The first contract for putting Ephesus into communication with the broad ocean of divine love was entrusted by the Lord Jesus to Paul. For, however far back the true religion may have extended through the early establishment of the synagogue worship, it was not until Paul had founded a Christian Church and buttressed it with an imperishable epistle that the work in Ephesus could be said to have approached its completion. Paul came to this seat and stronghold of heathendom to bring the whole city, if possible, to a knowledge of the truth, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ might bless its residents, one and all, "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". To this end he toiled, and taught all Christians to toil, prodigiously. To this end he endured hardships indescribable—"dying daily", as he tells the Corinthians, while fighting after the manner of men "with beasts at Ephesus". Night and day on bended knee he implored the living God to strengthen the Ephesian Chris-

tians in "the inner man", that they might be able "with all saints" to comprehend the infinite scope of redeeming love. He taught them that the whole contract of world-evangelization would have to move forward uninterruptedly on the high plane of living solely for the honor of Christ, and that their acceptableness in the sight of God would always be a matter of grace and not of merit, resting on the basis of faith and "not of works, lest any man should boast". Every thought of the heart, every act of the will, every stroke of the hand, would have to take place "as unto Christ", with a view to its being satisfactory "to the Lord, and not to men", and yet never without the consoling conviction that "whatsoever good thing any man", bond or free, should succeed in doing, would receive a recompense in keeping with the magnanimity of God. Nor were they for a moment to forget about that strong undercurrent in the stream of life which is always threatening to choke up the channel of grace by filling it afresh with the sediments of the carnal mind. Avarice, malice, all manner of uncleanness, "works of darkness", 'vanity of mind', 'spiritual hosts of wickedness' of all descriptions, would make their way if possible even into "the heavenly places" of the regenerate soul. Nothing but dredging, continuous, remorseless dredging, could keep the deep hidden channels of the heart open toward God or save the life from falling far behind in the work of reaching and reclaiming the lost. Thus the method employed in fulfilling the first contract was perfect; so that here, somewhat as to the Corinthians, Paul could have said, 'According to the grace of God, I, as a wise architect, laid a foundation, which others could build on'.

John's epistle is addressed to "the angel of the church"—to the church, that is to say, as the church ought to be, and must be if it means to measure up to the requirements of the perfect ideal, so as to be held aloft in the right hand of Christ as a star in the firmament of grace. The Ephesians are to be made aware once more that the Great Contractor is always among them to superintend and inspect their work in all its departments and in every particular. It is with Him that they have to do. He walks back and forth, and in and out, among the Churches, looking everywhere and seeing everything. He knows every toiler by name, takes account of his work, and of his motive for doing it. He is prompt to praise the accomplishment of the lowliest laborer, and to exhibit it before the world and the hosts of heaven, but in every aspect of it the thing accomplished must be right. The discrimination between good and evil must be free from ambiguity, the choice unhesitating and final, the purpose pure. For every stroke of every laborer affects the contract; and since the harbor is intended to afford an appropriate landing-place for Heaven's own Proconsul as He comes from age to age in the person of the Holy Spirit to bring the glad tidings of redemption to fallen men, it must be such as will elicit the unreserved approval of the Triune God. To live the Christian life is the grandest and most overawing task to which the human heart can address itself. It demands the ethical ordering of thought and reflection and judgment, the constant adjustment and articulation of subordinate aims, the uninterrupted clarifying of motives, the regulation of the affections, the control of the feelings, the inhibition of untoward desires—in short,

a conscious and conscientious application to the arduous, unromantic enterprise of continuous dredging.

That the Ephesians had been a most faithful group of Christians is strikingly emphasized. The third verse contains terms that have just been used in the second, but their recurrence is by no means a vain repetition. It is as though the Lord of glory, who had been walking watchfully through the Ephesian Church and holding its influence aloft in His right hand as a radiant star in the sky, had stopped to say, "I have observed your toil and your steadfast endurance and the burdens you bear, and my decision is that if any body of men has ever labored to the limit of mortal ability without counting it toil, or has ever shown steadfast endurance, or has ever carried next to unbearable loads, for the sake of a name, you have done it in your service of me".

For one thing, then, the Ephesians, up to a certain undetermined but definite moment in their history, had been indefatigable workers, who had realized that their efficiency depended on the stainlessness of their lives, and had resolved accordingly that they would keep themselves pure even as their beloved Lord was pure. Each one individually felt the blessedness of working under the immediate oversight of the Great Contractor.

Up to the same moment, moreover, the Christians of Ephesus had been very jealous for the honor of the church as an institution. Ephesus, since it was on a highway between Asia and Rome, was constantly crowded with visitors, who kept passing through the city from east to west and west to east like two processions. Naturally the

Jewish section, or "tribe"—to use John's word, which included the Christians, would receive its share of strangers. Some would stop but for a day or a week or a month. Others would remain longer, and many no doubt would make Ephesus their home. In this way the Church of Ephesus would have to deal from time to time, and frequently, with new and ever-changing situations, and with a wide variety of views and dispositions and characters. It was equal to the occasion, however; for as the letter intimates it distinguished itself by the fact that it would "not bear evil men". It discriminated. A man had to give satisfactory evidence of regeneration before he could get in; or if, after his admission, he was found to be wanting, he was given a fair trial, and an opportunity to face about and make good, with the alternative of losing his membership in case of continued perversity. Men who tried to palm themselves off for "apostles" discovered to their mortification that they had come to the wrong place. They were put on trial, exposed, shown to be "grievous wolves"; the sanctity of the church was preserved; the standard of righteousness was maintained; the banner of Christ was kept unsullied. The elders, whom Paul long before had commanded to "watch", had developed an exalted appreciation of the beauty and grandeur and wealth of the Christian ideal, and they had no intention of standing aside and seeing it crumbled into dust through the degrading influence of a few unscrupulous hypocrites. By discipline, which is but institutional dredging, they kept their Church pure.

Furthermore, up to the time in question the Ephesian

Church had been motivated by the worthiest of aims. You did it all, says the Great Contractor, "for my name's sake". To overlook this is to overlook the essence of everything. It is possible, as everyone knows, to take great pains to keep one's reputation clean without doing it from the highest of motives. It is possible also to act in a similar way in the matter of church discipline. But when a man undertakes to cultivate beauty and strength of character in order to reincarnate, as it were, the character of Christ; when he lives with a view to making the name of Christ, through his connection with it, represent nothing but purity and holiness and blessedness and whatsoever other things are lovely and of good report; when he orders all that concerns him so that men will be forced to feel that for him to live is for Christ to live; in a word, when Christ's honor becomes the incentive which uniformly determines the decisions of his will and the one thing which gives his emotional nature its deepest satisfaction—then that man's life clothes itself with an aspect of completeness, and becomes recognized everywhere as a life that has been devoted to a spiritual and supremely suitable end. In this respect the Church of Ephesus, in its best days, had no superior. Its membership, without any detraction to him, might fairly be placed in a category with the great Apostle to the Gentiles. They were taught that in them, if they would but honor the Father and become conformed to the image of His Son, God would bring Himself into the possession of a "rich" and glorious "inheritance". Through them God would actually make Himself wealthy. The thought electrified them. They made the attempt. They responded to "the

high calling of God". The exquisite toil and unfaltering perseverance involved in the process, they endured "to the praise of the glory of His grace". So that their "first works" were of such a character that they may be said to have reached, about as nearly as flesh and blood can come to doing it, the acme of Christian life and service. Paul outlined the first contract, and made his life an exemplification of the way in which it was to be carried out; they walked 'so as they had him for an ensample'; what wonder then that Christ so signally commends them!

There came a day, however, when the Church of Ephesus began to recede from its high apostolical standing. Not that the defect was obtrusive; it was anything but that. To make the falling short in the matter of the "first love" to consist in the cooling down of "love toward the brethren", or in a "comparative indifference to the necessities of the poorer brethren", is to be singularly insensitive to the setting. Such things are not incipient failures; they are among the marks of sin "when it is finished". Indeed, the one thing which the context makes especially conspicuous is the fact, that the departure at first, as would be natural in its beginnings, was next to unnoticeable. It was so imperceptible that only Christ could discern it. Their trouble was inward and psychical; they were commencing to weaken in the delicate work of discriminating between right and wrong in moral motives. It was in the depths of the soul that the debris was accumulating. Apparently, in an outward way, everything was going on as usual. As much as this is proved incontrovertibly by the tenses used. "Thou canst not bear evil men", says Christ—you cannot

bear them now, at this very moment; and "thou hast patience"—with you patient endurance is a present possession; and "this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate"—you hate them at this instant, and all the time, just as I hate them at this instant and all the time. The present tense shows, and is used for the purpose of showing, that on the surface everything was smooth, and that there was no room whatsoever for criticism. To the same effect also is the testimony of the perfect tense, as it stands in the third verse. You have toiled unweariedly in the past, it declares, and are continuing to toil unweariedly yet. So that the present tense and the perfect, as they occur in the context, combine their powers to assure us, that up to the minute in question observable facts left nothing to criticise.

The fatal tense, the one that lays its finger on the sore spot, confronts us in the middle verb of the third verse. It is neither present nor perfect; it is simply past. There was a time, says Christ in effect, when you carried your spiritual burdens solely "for my name's sake"; that time is gone; you are still toiling, it is true, are still holding out steadfastly, but in bearing your burdens now you are allowing personal considerations to creep in; your eye is no longer "single". There was no need to specify. They had broken away from the root principle of moral excellence. They were pursuing an ostensible purpose that was good, but harboring hidden motives that were bad. Away down in the region of "the thoughts and intents of the heart" they were slackening up on the dredging process. Some time in the past—the verb does not tell us when—they had

definitely broken away from the "love" that they had had at the "first". Here one is reminded of the fact that Paul in those earlier days had asked Timothy to "tarry at Ephesus", and had charged him to exhort the Ephesians not to recede from the highest level of Christian living, and had summed the matter up by remarking that "the end of the charge", that in which the essence of it resided, that in which it reached its finality, was "love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned". Such love centres in the invisible Saviour, and only in Him; works for His honor, and only for His honor; can never rejoice "in iniquity", but only in "the truth". In the eyes of Christ the results of falling away from this kind of love are potentially unreckonable. It is with this default in mind, accordingly, that He says to Ephesus, "I have it against thee".

The language of the fifth verse, illuminated by an antecedent millenium of the city's history, is transcendently impressive. "Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; if not, I am coming to thy disadvantage, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place." Who is so dead as not to be able to see the original city gradually falling back from the coast as the Cayster through the centuries keeps silently silting up the vanishing gulf? How vividly the earlier Ionian Ephesus in ages past must have remembered in its day 'whence it had fallen'! How keenly its citizens must have regretted their indolence in abandoning the operations which presumably must have been oftentimes resorted to in the beginning to keep the city in touch with the sea! How

vexatious it must have been for them to be obliged to stand there helplessly, when it was too late, and watch the receding gulf calmly removing their city 'out of its place'! How gratefully also must the men of John's day have recalled from time to time what the splendid Pergamenian contract had done for the second Ephesus in keeping it from falling back into a corresponding oblivion! How happy it must have made them to be reminded of the day when Nero repented of the Empire's indifference and resolved to "do the first works"!

Upon minds familiar with such a setting the words of our Lord must have fallen with peculiar power. The Ephesians, in where the eye of God could see, were coming short. They were not now keeping Christ supreme in their thought. The gulf of their heavenward affections was silting up. Egoistic interests were clogging the channel of their "first love". Subliminally they had shifted their ground from "grace" to "works". They were beginning to plume themselves on their creditable conduct, as though by their toil they could merit a good standing before God. In living for their own sake, however, instead of for Christ's, they had already fallen away, by a distance that was appalling, from the redemptive ideal. Christ pleads with them therefore to 'remember whence they had fallen'; for even then they were farther removed, a million times over, from the divine standard of excellence for moral motives, than men were in the habit of thinking of ancient Ephesus in its relation to the sea. Nor was their recollection of this contingency to be fitful or transitory. They were to get the present reprehensible situation in mind distinctly and

keep it in mind continuously, so that the infinite offensiveness of their inward divergence might be fixed in their memories for all time to come. To forget for so much as a moment how God regards even the slightest disparagement of His Son is something which a Christian can never afford to do. "Remember", says Christ; but in English the word needs to be followed by some adverb like "unceasingly" in order to reproduce the thought in its fulness.

The next thing that Christ demands is repentance. There must be a change of mind. Any man who thinks that he can merit any favor on his own account in the sight of God, or who undertakes any kind of Christian work with a view to the honor it will reflect upon himself instead of with a view to the honor it will reflect on the Saviour of men, has assumed an attitude which, if persisted in, will leave him "with no hope, and without God in the world". Such an attitude must be abandoned once for all, abandoned by an instantaneous act which shall never need to be repeated, by an act that will change all the impulses of the heart and all the activities of the will irreversibly, and empower the man to lay his life and all that is within him as a tribute of love at the feet of Jesus.

Furthermore and finally, they must resume their labors on the basis of the original contract. And here again, as is so often the case in the Apocalypse, the whole angle of thought comes to light in the tense the writer employs. Christ is not urging the Ephesians to begin work, or to keep on working; they had begun, and had never ceased, to work; they were toiling unweariedly at the moment; up to the instant in question there was no fault to be found with

them in this respect. It all lay in this—at first their toil was all expended for "His name's sake"; now they had lost sight of this transcendent ideal, so that to work as they were working at the time was the same as not to be working at all. It was like dredging the harbor and hauling the sediments back to be dumped again into the mouth of the Cayster. The system in use at the moment was but helping to move their spiritual city out of its place. Get back therefore to the method that counts, says Christ. The command does not enjoin them to "do the first works" all over again, but to bring up their motives and labors once more to the level of the initial programme. This is to be done immediately, and in such a manner as to make it unnecessary ever to do it again. To be sure, says the Great Contractor, you hate the contract as outlined by the Nicolaitans, but your own operations, as long as you work on the basis of the second plan, are, at bottom, one in essence with theirs. If the work of the Ephesians was to tell for good, it would have to be done for Christ's sake, and for no other end. Then, and then only, could it be said of them, "Ye are the light of the world". Should they fail or decline to live on this highest conceivable plane, there was but one thing to do—Christ Jesus would have to move their "candlestick out of its place". They would be forced back from the coast, and would cease to be in touch with the great highway that had been constructed for the world's evangelization. Their influence for good would come to an end. They would be cut off from the unspeakable joy and honor of sharing in the transmission of the glad tidings of redemption. It was no light penalty

that was awaiting them in case they should choose to remain unrepentant. It was nothing short of total abandonment and spiritual effacement.

But He who walks among the toiling multitudes that are agonizing night and day for His name's sake is not an Overseer who cannot be touched with a feeling of His laborers' infirmities. "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust". He has no thought of having men work on His contract without sustenance or without reward. The hunger of the heart is not hidden from His knowledge. He was no stranger to the loneliness of the solitary way. He passed victoriously through it all, and the reason was that He always had "meat to eat" which the world knew nothing of. This meat helped Him to win the victory, and crowned the winning of it with blessedness. He is speaking out of His own experience accordingly when He says, "To him that overcometh" —that is to say, to him that keeps overcoming day by day and year by year as the passing moments fly—will I give to eat, keep giving to eat continuously, "of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God".

It is nothing short of a calamity that these words should be etherealized into an assurance that a heaven awaits the Christian in a future world; they are the Lord Christ's promise and guarantee, written into the very terms of the contract, that the genuine Christian shall be able to anticipate the blessedness of heaven, shall be able to carry the comforts of Paradise about with him here in the flesh, in the depths of his soul, while he is toiling. Did Paul have to wait until he was beheaded before he could eat of the

fruit of that tree? Did he have to be buried before he could enter into the felicities of Paradise? Had John never sat down under the wide-spreading branches of the "tree of life" and found its fruit sweet to his taste? Paul ate of that fruit all the time. So did John. So does every child of God. The very secret of Christianity, the thing that singles it out from everything else in the universe and makes it unique, is the fact that it makes even a Patmos a Paradise. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—in the endurance of these things, even while they are going on, "we are more than conquerors", and for the very reason that we have "meat to eat" which the world knows nothing about. The man who toils at dredging and suffers unceasingly in the name of Christ to keep the channel open for himself and for all men out into the deep sea of celestial love has a peace of mind which no adversity can reach. He has reserved his heart as an earthly residence for God. Christ walks and works in the garden of his soul, is the happy Guest in the palace of his conscience, the unfailing Source of Supply for every need. Paradise begins here. The Christian life itself is paradisaical. Let a man but go to work on the contract of keeping the harbor open for the coming of heaven's great and gracious "Proconsul" and it will not take him long to discover that even though it be on crumbs there is a way of 'faring sumptuously every day'. He will not have to limit himself to the thin fare of a future hope—good and all as that is in its place—but will find himself feeding daily on a present ineffable reality.

Thus by the letter to the Church of Ephesus the Holy

Spirit says to the entire church of the living God in all ages, "Overcome day by day the odds that would baffle you in your work for Christ and it shall be yours day by day to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God".

CHAPTER V

PREFATORY TO LECTURE III

BECKWITH, crowding much into a sentence: "Smyrna, north of Ephesus, at the head of a deep gulf of the Aegean, was in wealth, commercial importance, and splendor one of the foremost cities of Asia Minor. It was a seat of the emperor-worship, with which the Christians must come into conflict; and a Jewish element existed among its inhabitants, bitterly hostile to the Christians and strong enough to exert influence with the Roman authority. Hence the Church there was in special peril". Mommsen's two volumes, *The Provinces*,—particularly Vol. I, Ch. VIII, pp. 353–384,—are really indispensable to a sensitive appreciation of the Apocalypse. As one reads one feels that Mommsen speaks with authority. "The Greek rule, when it set in, found not much to do in the coast districts; Smyrna, which centuries before had been destroyed by the barbarians of the interior, rose at that time from its ruins in order speedily to become one of the first stars in the brilliant belt of the cities of Asia Minor" (p. 353). Again, quoting "an author living in Smyrna under the Antonines": "No province of them all has as many towns to show as ours (Asia Minor), and none such towns as our largest. It has the advantage of a charming country, a favorable climate, varied products, a position in the centre of the Empire, a girdle of peaceful people all round, good order, rarity of crime, gentle treatment of slaves, consideration and goodwill from the rulers" (p. 384).

Naturally, then, anything that would in any wise disturb such conditions, especially the "*consideration and goodwill from the rulers*", would be instinctively resented by the suspicious citizens. And naturally, too, Smyrna, heading as she did the list of cities noted for faithfulness, would be doubly solicitous in guarding her good name. Accordingly, the slightest disturbance in the religious atmosphere of Smyrna would be likely to eventuate in a persecution of Christians.

Moreover, the equipment was complete in the matter of means. The religious affairs of the Province were under the supervision of a "diet" or "commune". Mommsen (within the pages as cited above) tells us that there were "as many chief priests . . . as there were provincial temples", and that the high priest was "the most eminent dignitary of the province". "These priests", he says, "appointed from the provincials of mark by the diet of the province were by their traditions and their official duties far more called and inclined than were the imperial magistrates to animadvert on neglect of recognized worship, and (where dissuasion did not avail, as they had not themselves a power of punishment) to bring the act punishable by civil law to the notice of the local or imperial authorities, and to invoke the aid of the secular arm—above all, to bring the Christians face to face with the demands of the imperial cultus". Also: "The very practical consequences of the provincial regulation of the imperial cultus—the exercise of religious superintendence and the persecution of persons of another faith—were drawn pre-eminently in Asia Minor". Also (for these facts are vital to the elucida-

tion of much that follows): "In Roman as in pre-Roman times nine towns of the Troad performed in common religious functions and celebrated common festivals. The diets of the different provinces of Asia Minor, which were here as in the whole empire called into existence as a fixed institution by Augustus, were not different in themselves from those of the other provinces. Yet the institution developed itself, or rather changed its nature, here in a peculiar fashion. With the immediate purpose of these annual assemblies of the civic deputies of each province—to bring its wishes to the knowledge of the governor or the government, and generally to serve as organ of the province—was here first combined the celebration of the annual festival for the governing emperor, and the imperial system generally. Augustus in the year 725 (B.C. 29) allowed the diets of Asia and Bithynia to erect temples and show divine honor to him at their places of assembly, Pergamus and Nicomedia".

Within the time that concerns us, then, the following facts, as touching the matter in hand, should be specially noted. 1. An elaborate festival, rotating among nine of the principal cities, was held in the Province of Asia every year; 2. In connection with this festal occasion the "diet" sat annually for the purpose of bringing important matters to the attention of the Imperial authorities; 3. Among other things the festival afforded a fine opportunity for honoring the Emperor "with a brilliant and loyal worship"; 4. The priests in charge, who then as now loved to be known as "eminent" dignitaries, even outstripped the Emperors in their anxiety to have this worship rendered enthusiasti-

cally and unreservedly; 5. Any "neglect of recognized worship" or opposition to the "Imperial cultus" awakened their anger, and was reported by them to the "diet"; 6. To the "diet", though composed of "the *civic* deputies of each province", was committed the oversight of *religious* affairs; 7. Though not itself invested with the "power of punishment", the "diet" could "bring the Christians face to face with the demands of the Imperial cultus", and "invoke the aid of the secular arm". Thus, from the days of Augustus the machinery for harassing the Christians in Asia Minor was complete. It seems to have been but sparingly used until the reign of the hateful Domitian, but it was there all the while and ready to be put into operation at a moment's notice.

In this connection we must pause to note the corresponding advantage enjoyed by the Jews. Their synagogues, of course, were primarily places of worship, but the "rulers" of the synagogue were clothed with certain civil powers as well. In their civic capacity they were the "Council of Three". They could pass sentence, and inflict punishment. Alford, on Matt. 10:17: "The scourging in the synagogues is supposed to have been inflicted by order of the Tribunal of Three, who judged in them". Cf. also Lightfoot, *Har. of the Four Evangel.*, Lk. 4:15. See Mk. 13:9; Lk. 12:11; Acts 22:19 and 26:11. To what extent the "rulers of the synagogues" could exercise their civic functions under the Romans in Asia Minor does not appear, but that they could approach the Imperial authorities in about the same way as the "diet" could seems to be a warrantable inference. From Eusebius (H.E. iv, 15) we learn

that when Polycarp was arrested and brought before the Proconsul at Smyrna the Jews were there to accuse him and demand his condemnation. Manifestly, in this regard they were on the same footing as the "diet". At all events, it may safely be concluded that if the "diet" and the "synagogue" should acquiesce in condemning a Christian for refusing to comply with the Emperor-worship, and their representatives should appear against him in the presence of the Proconsul, there would be next to no possibility of his escaping martydom. The synagogue of Smyrna was doing for the Christians what the Sanhedrim had done in the case of Christ; it was handing them over to the civil authorities. The tragedy here was to be the same as the tragedy recorded in the Gospel of John (19:16): "Then"—when the apostate church had declared, "We have no king but Caesar", and the world had taken the apostate church at its word—"Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified". When the church and the world agree, the time has come for the child of God to prepare for martyrdom.

A word or so more about Smyrna. Swete (p. lxi): "The city was worthy of its surroundings; its streets were straight and well paved; public buildings were numerous, including a library, an odeum, a stadium, a theatre, a **temple of Homer** (τὸ Ὁμήρειον) with a portico attached to it, and other large two-storied porticoes. . . . The public games of Smyrna were noted for their magnificence, and it was one of the cities where periodical festivals were held under the authority of the *Commune Asiae* in honor of the Augusti. On such occasions Christian citizens were doubt-

less placed in a position of peculiar peril, but at no season would they be regarded with favorable eyes by a population immersed in business and pleasure, devoted to the local cults, and proud of its loyalty to Rome and the Emperor".

8. As a reproduction of the thought to be set forth by ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν both the Authorized rendering—**"was dead, and is alive"**—and the Revised—**"was dead and lived again"**—would seem to come short. By the crucifixion it **'came about'** that He had a body that was dead, and yet *in spite of that fact* He **"lived"**, lived absolutely, lived right along. That His body became a corpse simply gave Him an opportunity to leave it for the time being and enter, disembodied, into Paradise until the morning of the third day. It was from the fact that He lived *right on through death* that the Christians of Smyrna were to derive their comfort and encouragement.

The R. V., by supplying "again", really obliterates the significance of ἔζησεν.

9. The external evidence makes it necessary to omit ἔργα (**works**), both here and in v. 13, and the relationship existing between the first three letters, as we shall see, justifies the omission internally as well. Θλίψιν means **to be in straits**; it is distress resulting from being hard pressed, from being ruthlessly hemmed in on every side, from being reduced in fact to helplessness; while πτωχείαν is **abject poverty,** penury. Helplessness! Penury! And yet they were holding on unflinchingly, and facing martyrdom as an impending climax! How much the grace of God can do for men! In ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ (**but you are rich**),

we have an example of our author's exuberant vivacity, a thought thrown in, a short radiant parenthesis, a lamp "shining in a dark place". Βλασφημίαν (**blasphemy**),—not mere calumny; the Jews were more than abusive; they blasphemed God. Justin Martyr, less than half a century later, in a dialogue with a Jew, covers the whole intervening time, when he says (*Dial. c. Tryph.*, 17): "For after that you had crucified Him . . . you not only did not repent of the wickedness you had committed, but at that time you selected and sent out from Jerusalem chosen men through all the land to tell that the godless heresy of the Christians had sprung up, and to publish those things which all they who knew us not speak against us. . . . Accordingly, you displayed great zeal in publishing throughout all the land bitter and dark and unjust things against the only blameless and righteous Light sent from God". Also (16): "Cursing in your synagogues those who believed in Christ. For you do not have authority to lay hands on us yourselves, because of those who govern you. But as often as you were able to, you did it". Charles (on v. 10): "The persecution with which the Church is here threatened shows that the Jews are acting in concert with the heathen authorities". The Jews slandered Christ, cursed those who believed on Him, joined hands with heathendom against their own Messiah. The statement is very forcible: I know the blasphemy of those who profess themselves to be Jews—true Jews, of course—and are not Jews at all, but a mere synagogue of Satan. By this word "blasphemy" the way is being prepared for what is to come later on, particularly in ch. 17. The synagogue is called "a syn-

agogue of Satan", because it lends itself to "the devil" to be made use of in getting men into prison to be held over for trial and martyrdom.

10. It should be deeply pondered, right here, when our Lord is dealing with cold historical facts, in connection with men and institutions in the city of Smyrna, that He attributes all opposition to righteousness, in its origin, to Satan. Later the language will become more highly figurative, but the key to the meaning there is put into our hands here, in the letter to Smyrna. The comments of Trench (*Epistles to the Seven Churches, in loco*) would be hard to excel: "The manner in which this persecution of the saints is here traced to the direct agency of Satan, is very well worthy of observation. We sometimes assume that Christians were persecuted, because the truth for which they bore witness traversed the interests, affronted the pride, would have checked the passions of men; and this is most true; but we have not so reached to the ground of the matter. . . . These great fights of affliction, through which they were called to pass, were the immediate work of the devil, and no mere result of the offended passions, prejudices, or interests of men." Trench objects, and manifestly with reason, to the view that πειρασθῆτε refers to "the gracious trials of God". "Assuredly this is not so", he says, "and Tyndale and Cranmer, who translate, 'to tempt you', are to be preferred; so Marckius: 'Ut tentemini; non simplici probatione constantiae, quo pacto Deus tentat suos, sed incitatione ad malum et infidelitatem, quo pacto Deus neminem tentat'." The point was to wreck the new movement, to counteract and if possible to annihilate the

new force that was daily and everywhere making itself felt. But to this end, as Satan well knew, temptation was mightier than the sword. There is a certain halo about martyrdom, but recantation is corrosive. Man is so constituted that he admires a real martyr even though he may have no manner of sympathy with the martyr's views. To get a man to recant in prison, accordingly, is a far greater triumph than to have him martyred for not recanting. And so the Christians of Smyrna are warned that "the devil" will do his most subtle work in the solitude of the prison cell. It is difficult to decide between ἕξετε (**you shall have**), and ἔχητε (**you may have**). Beckwith holds the latter to be "inferior as regards sense and authorities"; Swete and Charles adopt the latter, which, perhaps, when all is said, is the less acceptable, for one can easily see how copyists would be inclined to substitute ἔχητε for ἕξετε, in order to make it correspond with πειρασθῆτε, though we must not, of course, be unduly governed by "horrible imaginings". The sense, however, seems to be that the devil would cast some of them into prison, in order that to begin on, as the aorist implies—they might be seduced; in order that their faith might be undermined—irrevocably; in order that they might recant, and recant for good; and accordingly, adds our Lord, to that end, with that in view as the devil's own objective, "**you shall have tribulation**" (ἕξετε θλίψιν), you shall be put under "pressure", you shall be given "the third degree", **for a short time** (ἡμερῶν δέκα), which is but to say until such time as your persecutors shall be convinced that it would be useless to prolong the process. "In the records of the church's early conflicts with the

heathen", says Trench, "we constantly find the prison doing its part; those who endured torture bravely being returned to prison, that so it might be seen whether hunger and thirst, darkness and chains, would not be effectual in breaking down by little and little the courage and the steadfastness which had resisted manfully the first and more violent onset of the foe. Sometimes it would prove so."

Thus the **"ten days"** (ἡμερῶν δέκα) begin to assume an intelligible aspect. It is not in any case to be thought of literally. It belongs to the symbolism of the book. It is symbolism's way of designating a short indefinite space of time—a space of time, however, which, though short, a conclusion justified if not demanded by the word "days", may be lengthened or lessened at will, at least to some extent, by the sufferer. The expression is not in the *accusative*, which would signify, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days"; it is in the *genitive*, which signifies, "Ye shall have tribulation *for some portion of the time within* the ten days". Their imprisonment at most would be short, but they could themselves make it longer or shorter by their grit, their courage, their attitude. If they should have grace enough to keep them from showing any signs of weakening or fear, their period of tribulation would be short indeed; if their courage and steadfastness should seem to waver and break down "by little and little", the hour of temptation would naturally be prolonged. The matter of making their testimony telling and sublime lay in no small measure with themselves.

Γίνου πιστός—not **"be thou"** (ἴσθι), but **"continue to**

become faithful"; let there be no lapse in your faithfulness even though you may be required to pass through the dark valley and shadow of death. Πιστός, in fact, is the characteristic word of the letter. The choice of it in connection with the city whose fame for loyalty was world-wide at the time, we may rest assured, was deliberate. The word has the effect of creating the impression that Smyrna was selected as one of the symbolical seven for the very reason that it was itself such a living and conspicuous illustration of this admittedly "crowning" excellency of Christian character. Then, too, it was adapted, if not designed, to produce a reaction. How could the citizens of Smyrna continue to persecute and burn at the stake the destitute and inoffensive Christians for exhibiting the very trait which had made their city the pride of the Empire? Τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς (**the garland of life**). If the city itself was chosen, as it seems to have been, with the specific purpose of furnishing an underlying illustration of the truth of the message which the letter contains, it will be necessary or consistent at least, to think of the "crown" as referring to the wreath of the victor, since Smyrna, as all the writers observe, was particularly noted for the magnificence of its games. It is true, of course, that the row of palaces and battlements by which the acropolis was adorned was suggestive of a royal diadem, but otherwise there is nothing in the letter to lead to that idea, and, had that been the thought, the word for "diadem" was at the writer's disposal. "*Of life*"—is this an appositive genitive, merely epexegetical, meaning a wreath or crown of which life itself is the material, or is our Lord saying, "I will give you life's real crown,

namely, the consciousness of having won the victory"? Is not life's crown precisely the consciousness that in Christ Jesus one is not a failure? The "crown of life" which the Christian wears is what Paul calls "the peace of God which passeth all understanding". It comes to the believer as his daily reward for running with patience the race that is set before him, and of course it is amaranthine and will be worn for ever.

11. Again our Lord insists that what He is saying to Smyrna is for the church universal, and that when His message, delivered orally to John, shall have been written down in the form of a letter, it will be, like the rest of the Scriptures, the product of inspiration. The second clause of the verse is an eloquent climax—not in high sounding words but in the thing in itself. The "second death" is the only thing that any man born of woman has any cause to be afraid of. But there is a way of making even that lose its dreadfulness. The man who makes Christ the object of his love and loyalty, and marches straight through Satan's ranks in scorn of martyrdom while here on earth, will be able to cross the bounds of "second death" with total unconcern. The last and most formidable enemy of souls stands nerveless in his presence. Over it he is 'more than a conqueror'. He does not even need to fight it. For him it is vanquished now. Charles: This "is probably an editorial addition of our author. Here the addition is unhappy, for it comes in the form of an anti-climax after the great promise in 10". An anti-climax! Is the Fifteenth of First Corinthians an anti-climax? Furthermore, was John inspired? If so, is the 'unhappy' anti-climax

to be laid to the charge of the Holy Spirit? Or is Dr. Charles a lineal descendant of those disciples who said to Paul, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost"? Under the hand of Dr. Charles and scholars of his way of thinking the Book of Revelation, whether they mean it to be so or not, ceases to be Scripture. "To be, or not to be" may be a great question; but to be *and* not to be is impossible. If the Apocalypse, in its final form, is the output of "a faithful but unintelligent disciple" of the John who only got as far as ch. 20:3 when he died, leaving nothing but a conglomerate pile of notes for the "faithful but unintelligent disciple" to straighten out and piece together as best he could from that point on, and if this "faithful but unintelligent disciple", as Charles maintains, is to be held responsible for the larger part of "some twenty-two or more interpolated verses in our text", and if much that the "faithful but unintelligent disciple" did not venture to meddle with contains "expectations" that are "mutually exclusive" (Vol. I, pp. 43–44), and "discordant elements" that "can best be explained by the hypothesis that our author wrote these Letters at a much earlier date than the Book as a whole", (though the elapsing time was evidently not sufficient to enable him to harmonize the discrepancies)—if these things are to be regarded as true, where does inspiration come in? According to the foregoing our original author even at the best could only have been inspired at his more limpid moments. And it has taken some eighteen hundred years to find out just when these limpid moments were. And even yet no two exponents of such a theory can find it possible to agree.

The so-called contradictions, and discrepancies, and "discordant elements", and "expectations" that are "mutually exclusive", arise from nothing but unwarrantable assertions based on palpable misinterpretations. Before a patient, exact, historical exegesis they will vanish, or better still, they will never so much as put in an appearance.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

To the angel of the Church in Smyrna write: These things saith the First and the Last, the One who lived even while His body lay dead in the tomb—"I know your distress and penury (but you are rich in the kind of riches that count), and I know the blasphemy of those men who are always professing themselves to be real genuine Jews and are not Jews of the genuine sort at all, but just a veritable synagogue of Satan. I am perfectly familiar with the situation in its entirety. Be not apprehensive therefore over the things which you are about to suffer. The devil is at the bottom of it all. He has license to kill the body, but has no power to kill the soul. His opposition is inevitable; you may as well expect it. He is about to cast some of you into prison to tempt you. And there is no use in minimizing things; you shall have dire distress for a short space of time—longer or shorter according to the way in which this forewarning may enable you to conduct yourselves. Keep on being faithful, as the moments pass, down to the very instant when death claims the body, and I will give you the wreath that makes the race worth the running and life worth the living. This is the message of

the Spirit not to you in Smyrna only, but to the church as a whole. He that has ears to hear let him hear. Every one who holds fast the profession of his faith without wavering and overcomes the adversaries of Christ and of his own soul as they arise will be able to challenge "the second death" on his own domains and laugh him out of countenance".

Chapter Two, verses 8–11.

CHAPTER VI

THE LETTER TO SMYRNA

A Message Concerning the Defeat of Death

OVER Smyrna, as it flourished in the days of John, more than a thousand years had done their work and spread their lustre. Of the cities in the Province of Asia it claimed to be the "first in size and beauty", and had its claims allowed. It reclined serenely on the southern shore of a wedge of the sea that made its way deep into the mainland toward the east. By looking through the eyes of Sir William Ramsay, as he gazes from "the deck of a ship lying out in the gulf before the city", we may be able to reproduce the scene, and something too, perhaps, if we let our fancy loose, of "the golden olden glory of the days gone by". "The traveller from the west", he says, "sails up an arm of the sea, which runs far inland. At the south-eastern end he finds Smyrna, with the hills behind it on the south and west, the sea on its north side, and on the east a beautiful little valley, nine miles by four, bounded by more distant mountains. The buildings of the city rise out of the water, cluster in the hollow below the hills, and on the lower skirts of Pagos, 'the Hill', or straggle up irregularly towards the summit". It is a scene, he says, in which "there is a wonderful feeling of brightness, light, and activity". Further on he quotes Apollonius of Tyana, who says: "Though it is the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, and makes the sea its own, and holds the

fountains of Zephyrus, yet it is a greater charm to wear a crown of men than a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold beyond the standard of mankind: for buildings are seen only in their own place, but men are seen everywhere and spoken about everywhere and make their city as vast as the range of countries which they can visit". Following this again, to like effect, Ramsay presents us with a picture drawn from the orations of Aelius Aristides, who regards Smyrna as "the ideal city on earth" and compares it "to the crown of Ariadne shining in the heavenly constellation", and holds its distinguishing characteristics to be "the grace which extends over every part like a rainbow, and strains the city like a lyre into tenseness harmonious with itself and with its beautiful surroundings, and the brightness which pervades every part and reaches up to heaven, like the glitter of the bronze armor in Homer". In fact, to the mind's eye of Aristides Smyrna sat like a goddess—her head in the blue empyrean crowned with a diadem of shining battlements, her feet resting placidly on a carpet of nature's richest green woven from the groves and shore-engirdling woodlands that clustered round the harbor.

Of all earthly cities, therefore, in the estimation of her citizens—and even of their neighbors, had they but been disposed to express their thoughts—Smyrna was the queen. To her belonged the crown. She was herself a crown. Nor is the thought to be confined to the appearance which the city made to the natural eye. Her citizens meant that the resemblance should be a thing of deeper reality. In the judgment of Apollonius, as we have seen, that the city should wear a crown of "porticoes and pictures and gold"

was but a matter of trifling significance. The similitude, in order to be of any value, in order indeed not to be a mark of dishonor, would have to be indicative of nobility of soul. To match their mural diadem they would have to wear the crown in philosophy, in art, in letters, in courage and fortitude, in justice and integrity, in elegance, in courtliness, in urbanity, and in everything else that was appropriate to a diadem. Nothing, accordingly, that might be said about a crown would be likely to escape their notice or fail to call forth their careful and sympathetic consideration.

But Smyrna had had her tribulations too. Her early history, it is true, as was also the case again in John's day, was an epoch of brilliancy. The city shortly after its founding became an Ionian colony, great enough and powerful enough and progressive enough to extend its dominion eastward far beyond the valley in which it was situated. At one time it was equal to the task of holding the whole Lydian kingdom at bay, single-handed, and of bidding defiance to the armies of Asia. But the day arrived when the tables were turned. The Lydian power gained the ascendancy. Smyrna was defeated, destroyed, practically demolished. As a Greek community it ceased to exist. For about three hundred years, as Strabo tells us, it was reduced to little insignificant settlements scattered here and there over the valley and adjacent hills, and was dispossessed of course of its sovereignty, of its power to manage its own affairs, and so, if not of the spirit of freedom, at least of its exercise. Under such conditions it regarded itself as good as dead. It had lost the characteristics of what the Greeks would call a city. And yet in spite of all

its adversities Smyrna never quite abandoned its old Ionian ideals. As a municipality it became a corpse for three long centuries, but through it all its spirit lived. With the new era ushered in by Alexander's victories Smyrna leaped into life again. "In the history of the ancient world", says Larned, "there was never another such time of new city creation as then. Alexander had begun it, planting colonies and the germs of cities, in the old Greek fashion, wherever he went. Seleucus, his final chief successor in Asia, and Antiochus, the son of Seleucus, did even more. The new cities were all Greek cities, essentially, in character, culture, and spirit, propagating influences which their older neighbors, even in the close communion of the Jews, could not resist". Of such cities, in the Province of Asia, Smyrna stood at the head of the list. It had passed through its epoch of dishonor only to be "raised in glory". In a manner, it had died and come to life again, and when it thought of its eras of splendor, it thought of them naturally as "the first and the last". It had had its intervening centuries of "tribulation and poverty", but now it was "rich"—and not in gold and silver, merely, but in that which it esteemed to be incomparably more desirable than gold and silver even in unreckonable quantities, namely, in its possession of freedom. Since its hardships had ended so consolingly, and its tenacity had been rewarded so superbly, it need nevermore be discouraged by the things it might be called upon to "suffer".

There was one thing more, however, which distinguished the city of Smyrna, and that was its loyalty to Rome. Cicero speaks of it as "the city of our most faithful and

most ancient allies". From Tacitus we learn that it dedicated a temple to the goddess of Rome as early as one hundred and ninety-five years before Christ, an act by which it served notice on Antiochus the Great, while he was at the height of his power, and when the supremacy of Rome was by no means a certainty, that it had pooled its interests with the rising Republic on the banks of the Tiber. And later, while Jesus was toiling as yet but as a workman of Nazareth, it had become one of eleven contesting cities for the distinction of erecting a temple to Tiberius, and was finally accorded the coveted privilege, because in the catalogue of its conspicuous loyalties it could point to the fact that its citizens, in a distressing emergency, had stripped the raiment from their own backs to alleviate the sufferings of Sulla's army. They meant to be faithful to Rome if they had to die for it. No wonder therefore that Rome, in turn, was always ready to guarantee that Smyrna should live. For Smyrna at least, if Rome could have it so, there was to be no "second death".

Thus the history of Smyrna answers point for point to the things that are said in this letter, for when the letter is read with the salient features of Smyrna's experience vividly in mind, it assumes the form of a compact mosaic built out of gems selected from the treasuries of a whole millennium. Let us sum it up within the compass of four or five sentences. Two resplendent eras—"the first and the last"! Midway between them, death—able to bind for a time, but unable to accomplish its purpose! Within the long dark interval of death's apparent supremacy, "tribulation and poverty"—galling, humiliating, depress-

ing, yet unceasingly ennobled by the imperishable riches embedded in the spirit of freedom! Enforced, protracted suffering—metamorphosed through time into joy, mounting on pinions of beauty into ever brightening skies of hope and achievement, apprehended in the light of its power to transfigure the life, and consequently never more to be feared! And best of all the city's crown of crowns, its "crown of life" in fact, namely, faithfulness to Rome—a source of unshakable assurance, as long at least as Caesar's eagles could wing their way to victory, against a second season of civic disintegration! Read or heard under the spell of its historical setting, therefore, how could the message to Smyrna be anything but surpassingly interesting and suggestive to its original recipients? The background itself is enchantingly attractive.

As the history of the city, then, and the conditions, circumstances and prospects of its Church were, as a mere matter of fact, providentially interwoven, or were in the process of being providentially interwoven, into a single fabric, the proper method of approach for the study of the letter should not be hard to find. Indeed, it is obvious. The Church of Smyrna, at the moment in question in the reign of Domitian, must be thought of as having already entered, though for how long a time we cannot say with exactitude, into the dark and trying period between the happy era of its founding and the crowning era of its promised reward for loyalty and faithfulness. The clear sky of the morning had given place to the gathering clouds of noon. The poverty of the Smyrnaean Christians, who in reality were the only genuine citizens of the municipality

as well as the only genuine members of the true church, was a present source of annoyance and chagrin; their tribulations had begun, and were an everyday experience; their exemplary life was a constant object of unabating Jewish scurrility; and the Jews, as we have reason to believe both from the letter itself and from other sources as well, were allowing no opportunities to pass unimproved of involving their victims in legal procedures with the tribunals of Rome. The machinery at their disposal for the accomplishment of such designs was well nigh perfect. It is altogether too often forgotten, or at least the significance of the fact is too often overlooked, that the synagogue was a civil court as well as a place of worship. Its officers sat on stated occasions in a judicial capacity to deal with criminals. They could accuse, put on trial, acquit or condemn, and within certain limitations could proceed to administer punishment. Paul tells how he "imprisoned and beat" the Christians "in every synagogue". And the synagogue could punish by scourging. It was a civil tribunal when it had civic duties to perform. And yet it was not so much what it could do as what it could not do that gave it its effectiveness in maltreating the Christians. Its officers could say, "Here are certain malefactors whom we have tried and found to be guilty of death; we have beaten and scourged them; your law forbids us to go farther than that; we now turn them over to you for execution". The Roman tribunal could reinvestigate, if it cared to, but how often would it take the pains to do so, especially when the wretched unfortunates invariably belonged to a grade of creatures who were despised and rejected of men? And

how easy it was under conditions then existing for the Jews to weave into the evidence something that would involve disloyalty to the reigning Emperor! Moreover, the Jews, everywhere within the bounds of the Empire, were under peculiar and pressing temptations in those days to take advantage of anything and everything that would help to restore them to the favor of the Romans. After the destruction of Jerusalem they had been denationalized. From that time on, as Mommsen says, "the Roman emperors were done with the state within the state". The Jews as a body had fallen into disgrace. They were anxious to ingratiate themselves, accordingly, with the Roman officials wheresoever and whensoever and howsoever they could. Consequently, if they could accomplish their ends by venting their malice on the hated Christians, we may be sure that they would compass sea and land to do it. And furthermore, we may be sure that the city which Rome regarded as the banner city of the Empire, and that the city which prided itself above all things else in that fact, would not be likely to tolerate anything that could be even tortured into bearing the semblance of disloyalty. What a tremendous advantage the synagogue of Smyrna had! It had the Christians at its mercy—and it had no mercy! Its virulence was almost incredible. In the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp we read that the wrath of the Jews was "ungovernable". They broke the law of the Sabbath to be present at his death. They gathered round the stake, and yelling in their rage helped to heap the faggots. They even went so far as to cry out, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the puller

down of our gods, who teacheth numbers not to sacrifice nor to worship". And what was this but to say once more, "We have no king but Caesar"? Is it any wonder that such men should be charged with "blasphemy", or that their synagogue should be called "a synagogue of Satan"? It was the Sanhedrim reborn, the Sanhedrim in miniature, the devil's own best agency, "the accuser of the brethren". It had a vantage-ground as a civil court which it was not backward to utilize. It held the key to the situation, and made the horizon black for the Christians.

And yet there was nothing to "fear". Had not Smyrna herself been all but annihilated? Had she not persisted even through death? Had she not eventually emerged into glory? And was not the spirit of Christ greater than the Greek conception of freedom? Had not Smyrna's faithfulness in the dark and doubtful day been her crown of life, her guarantee against a second demolition? And was Christ inferior to Caesar? There was nothing to be lost through suffering; there was everything to gain. Had not Jesus said to His disciples long years before, "Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you: yea and before governors and kings shall ye be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the Gentiles"? Persecution was to be the very thing by means of which the name of Christ was to be honored and published to the ends of the earth. It was to be shown to the world that with Christ in their hearts their hope of glory, men could die more composedly than their persecutors could live. Christ knew what was in His own. He did not need to equivocate, or to paint

a flowery pathway for them. The road they had to travel would be rough and thorny. Not all the lions they would meet with would be chained. They must be ready for any fate. Some of them, no doubt, would have to die at the hands of executioners, or be torn to pieces perhaps by the beasts of Smyrna. Ahead of them within the shadow death was lurking. Which should fall by the sword, or which should escape its violence, was one of the future's secrets. Only time would tell. Meanwhile it was required of a man that he should be heroic, that he should "be faithful" and "fear nothing". To die for Christ was but to win "the crown of life". The "second death" had been manacled. Its physical counterpart was meek and stingless. Persecution might endure for the night; joy would come in the morning. Admittedly glorious was the beginning; the end would be more so, "even life for evermore". If the Christians of Smyrna would but continue to be faithful to the point of dying the martyr's death, Smyrna would wear not merely "a crown of porticoes and pictures and gold", but "a crown of men", of splendid invincible men, who would "make their city as vast" as the habitable world, and place it as a shining diadem, brighter than the starry "crown of Ariadne", on the brow of Jesus. "Fear not" therefore, says our Lord; die, if need be, and win the day.

Eloquent appeals and golden promises and fervent descriptions of final triumphs, however, are not always enough to steel the heart for the tragedies of battle. What will victory be to the man who has fallen on the field? The soul demands the word of One who can make assur-

ance doubly sure, of One who has died upon the field and who has actually returned to tell of better things. And no wonder. Death is no trifle. No man encounters it without trepidation. One may have faced it with such scientific remorselessness, in one's own soul, in connection with the atonement, as to be able to stand in its presence anywhere unafraid, but even then who can say that the spirit is totally tremorless when by its own act it decides the instant of its final flight? It is one thing, as at Ephesus, to be comforted in the midst of unremitting toil and hardship by the promise of a constant and ever deepening sense of satisfaction as the moments pass, but quite another thing, as was likely to be the test at Smyrna, to be able to walk with complacency and quiet resignation to the headsman's block to be ushered prematurely into the mysteries of an untraversed eternity. The condition of the Ephesians demanded nothing more than that the Son of man should present Himself as the One who walks "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" and holds "the seven stars in His right hand"—in other words, as the One whose scrutiny is inescapable, and who rewards the patient toilers in His service with a place in the firmament of honor and everlasting influence. The conditions in Smyrna made additional and greater demands. Crucifixions and beheadings, to be accepted with joy, must have their compensations. And the compensations must be adequate. And of all that have ever been proposed only one is equal to the task. Only one is absolute. Only one is final. If what is said about Christ is not true, then nothing whatsoever avails, even approximately. Dying

means a life lost, and there the matter ends. Life has no equivalent. Death is the terminus. The future is empty. But if Christ can say, as in substance He does say to His friends in Smyrna, "I am the First and the Last; my body became a corpse once, and yet through it all I lived, and in due season returned to reclaim my body, and, clothed in it, entered into Paradise, where I am living now and will live for evermore", then martyrdom becomes but "a light affliction" working out for the martyred "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory", since the future is filled "with all the fulness of God", and to "depart and be with Christ" is far better.

How sublime, and apt, and accurate, and comprehensive, the description is! In the first clause all is light and blessedness. To say, "I am the First", is on a par with saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"; or with saying, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"; or with saying, "I and my Father are one". As the mind feels its way back toward the origin of all it finds Him, Jehovah's own daily delight, "in the form of God", "on an equality with God", "the effulgence" of the Father's glory, and "the very image of His substance", "Very God of Very God", in the undisputed possession of moral grandeur, ineffable beauty, and infinite bliss. And so with the second part. To say, "I am the Last",—what is it but to recall the appearance, the apocalypse, that so nearly overwhelmed the Apostle John? When John saw Him as "the Last", he recognized Him as the Son of man, our glorious High Priest, with hair as "white as snow", with eyes like a "flame of fire", with

feet like "burnished brass", and with a countenance outrivalling the splendors of the sun, again in the undisputed possession of moral grandeur, ineffable beauty, and infinite unending bliss. The prayer of the Upper Room had been answered. He had been glorified with the glory which He had with the Father "before the world was". To be with Him—would it not be ecstasy, "joy unspeakable and full of glory"?

Yes, but let it be remembered that to be "with Him" means to be "like Him". It is rapturous to think of Christ's passing from glory to glory. To have been with Him from the first to the last—what a favor it would have been! But His first glory lay in His acceptance of the Father's plan for the salvation of men, while His last glory lay in the fact that He brought that plan to perfect fulfilment in spite of infinite obstacles. He was "the First and the Last", but in order to be "the Last" He had to pass through ignominy and suffering and death; though He was rich, He had to become poor, that men through His poverty might be rich. Need the servant, then, expect to be greater than his Lord? It would be theirs in Smyrna, in carrying out the divine programme, not only to toil, and to bear up under heavy burdens, and to persevere untiringly, as the Ephesians were doing, but in all probability to crown their labor of love by being forced to witness the spoiling of their goods, and by being squeezed into narrow cells of dank repulsive dungeons, there to await trial and condemnation, and thence to be led forth, as Christ Himself was led, to the place of execution. Christ's message to Smyrna is—"If they have persecuted me, they will also

persecute you". But His promise is that if they are faithful, they will come through their tribulations and martyrdoms as victoriously as He came through the blackness of Calvary. To put it in the words of the Sermon on the Mount, He says to Smyrna, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven". Christian Science,—which lacks but two things of being what it is called, namely, Christianity and science,—and kindred puerilities, deny facts, or distort them, or try to evade them. Christianity takes account of things as they are. It wrestles with realities. It calls suffering suffering. It warns its possessors that they will have to endure hardship as good soldiers, and assures them that if they do so, for Christ's sake, they will be happy. It teaches that it is impossible to make a Christian poor. Men may rob him of his goods, of his liberty, of his health, of his life even, without touching his wealth, for his riches are hidden in the citadel of his soul, and his soul is beyond their reach. It was so with Christ. He had not where to lay His head, but He was rich. He was apprehended as a prisoner and led out to Golgotha, but His soul was satisfied. He was crucified, but the serenity of His inmost being was undisturbed. His spirit made its way instantaneously through the gates of Death and of the Unseen World into the presence of His Father in heaven. Then, on the morning of the third day, it returned to the tomb and reclaimed the body which

through its absence had become a corpse, and shortly afterwards body and spirit, reunited, ascended into glory. He died on the field, and returned to tell of better things. He clothed anguish and suffering in garments of light. He "abolished death". And now, in His crucified and glorious body, He appears again to John, and commissions him to encourage the Christians of Smyrna on His behalf. The message, written large, would run like this: "You have heard of the moral magnificence of my pre-existent state with the Father; I am sending John to tell you something of the moral magnificence of my present state, for I appeared to him in glory on the isle of Patmos; in me therefore, as I am now, you have before you the first and the last, the beginning and the end; between these two states, however, as you know, I was mocked, and insulted, and nailed to a tree, and laid in a sepulchre, and sealed in a tomb; in spite of this I rose from the dead, was received into glory, and am living today in supernal blessedness and will so live for evermore; I died, but by dying I defeated death—and not for myself alone, but for you; if you live righteously, and maintain your integrity, and are faithful to the end, accepting obloquy and martyrdom, should they come, fearlessly, gracefully, joyously, I will receive you to myself when all is over, that you may be with me where I am, to behold my glory and share it with me eternally in heaven; even I can do no more; is it not enough? Are you not content"? As the message to Smyrna would unfold its import to the minds of those to whom it was addressed, I can imagine how they would look one another in the eye, and would each say to his fellow, quietly but

unconquerably, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God". For the letter to Smyrna is what the Spirit says to the church when the church is confronted with the world's ultimatum, and the impression that the letter leaves is that the Church of Smyrna was ready to accept the challenge.

This letter to Smyrna fairly scintillates with sublimity. Back of it lies, and through it radiates, the whole philosophy of noble living. For whether we survey the history of the world at large, or the history of vast empires or smaller nations or notable cities, or the history of the Church of Jesus Christ—the queenliest institution of recorded time, or the biographies of illustrious men, or the life of the only begotten Son of God, we are everywhere confronted by that grand old adamantine truth, to which as yet no exceptions have ever been filed, that supremely worthy ideals pass into achievement in no other way than by the pouring out of the soul unto death. Exalted ideals are the "strait" gates of history, and only by agonizing are they ever entered. Consequently, great men are not afraid to suffer, for through their suffering they enter in through the gates into the city, into the city "which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God". And once within that city's walls a "second death" in inconceivable. "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

Through fear of death, in every age since sin has scarred and blackened the soul of man, earth's unregenerate myriads have been all their lifetime subject to bondage. Human nature shudders to face eternity. When Isabel asks Claudius to lay down his life to protect her name and honor Claudius trembles, and every syllable he utters fairly quivers with a terror which man, as man, has never been able to outgrow.

Isabel. What says my brother?
Claudius. Death is a fearful thing.
Isabel. And a shamed life a hateful.
Claudius. Ay, but to die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod;
* * * * *
'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life,
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death.
Isabel. Alas! alas!

Assuredly the "contract" of redemption that would overlook, or fail to provide for, this most appalling contingency in the universal experience of humankind would indeed be fatally defective. But here, in this short letter, we have been shown, the provision is complete. From beyond the bourne of death one Traveller, after half a century in glory, returns. If death has done anything for Him, it has but

served to surround Him with added splendors, and to fill His soul, if that were possible, with deeper bliss. The reborn man accordingly, since he is Christ's and Christ is his, may smile benignly at the "cold obstruction" of the grave. The worst the "last enemy" can do is to usher him into face-to-face companionship with "the King of Glory".

> "Here 's a stay
> That shakes the rotten carcass of old death
> Out of his rags".

It vindicates the goodness and power of God. It tells the believer that his life is to terminate in immortality, and that Death is dead.

CHAPTER VII

PREFATORY TO LECTURE IV

NOTHING will place us in a more advantageous position to understand the thirteenth chapter of this book than just a thorough mastery of the situation at Pergamos and Thyatira. Pergamos—Thyatira will be considered in the proper place—was the capital of the Province of Asia. It was also the principal seat of the state religion. Religion and politics will mix, it would seem, provided that the religion is paganistic. Ramsay, *Letters* p. 283: "The first, and for a considerable time the only, Provincial temple of the Imperial cult in Asia was built at Pergamum in honor of Rome and Augustus (29 B.C. probably). A second temple was built there in honor of Trajan, and a third in honor of Severus. Thus Pergamum was the first city to have the distinction of Temple-Warden both once and twice in the state religion; and even its third Wardenship was also a few years earlier than that of Ephesus. The Augustan Temple is often represented on its coins and on those struck by the Commune. As the oldest temple of the Asian cult it is far more frequently mentioned and figured than any other Asian temple; it appears on coins of many Emperors down to the time of Trajan, and is generally represented open, to show the Emperor crowned by the Province". Also p. 294: "A second Asian Temple had afterwards been built at Smyrna, and a third at Ephesus; but they were secondary to the original Augustan Temple at Pergamum". Pergamos

was the throne-city of the Province of Asia. In spite of all rivals it held, in this respect, the priority. It was the residence of sovereignty, and the sovereign was not a man merely, but a god, and demanded that his subjects should come into his temple from time to time and worship him as such. The state religion, therefore, since it centred in the Emperor, who had assumed the place and the prerogatives of God, "menaced with annihilation", says Charles, "the very existence of the church". This was especially true in the days of Domitian. Swete (p. lxxxvi) says, "It is known that Domitian went beyond his predecessor in asserting his own divinity: 'cum procuratorum suorum nomine formalem dictaret epistulam sic coepit: *Dominus et Deus noster hoc fieri iubet*'." The Emporer, **'our Lord and our God,** orders this and that to be done.' Also (p. lxxxviii): "He (Nero) shrank from the title of *Divus* and the erection of temples in his honor, because they seemed to forebode the approach of death, and Nero loved life better than a shadowy immortality. No such feelings held back Domitian from pressing his claims to Divine honors". Again (pp. lxxxix and xc): "These local temples"—temples in Pergamos, Smyrna and Ephesus erected to Augustus and called Augustea—"were not of merely local interest; their affairs were managed by the provincial league known as the **Commune Asiae** (τὸ κοινὸν τῆς **'Ασίας**), whose president was styled Asiarch, and perhaps also ἀρχιερεὺς τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς 'Ασίας. It belonged to the Asiarch to direct the worship of the Augusti throughout the Province, and to preside at games which were held quin-quennially in the cities where Augustea had been erected. Such festivals

are known to have been celebrated from time to time at five of the seven cities addressed in the Apocalypse, namely, at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, and Philadelphia. A system such as this, it is obvious, supplied machinery which could at any time be used against the Church with fatal facility. To refuse worship to Artemis or Asklepios was to decline a local cult; to refuse it to the statue of the Emperor at a time when the whole city was taking part in festivities organized by the *Commune*, was to expose oneself to the charge of disloyalty both to the provincial authorities and to the Emperor". From this Swete concludes (p. xci) that "this second Beast (the *Commune*) allies itself with the first, especially in the matter of the worship of the Augusti; indeed the first Beast is represented as leaving the affairs of the Emperor-cult entirely in the hands of the second". Cf. in particular ch. 13:12.

12. Charles thinks that τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῷ is the reading that should be adopted at the head of all the letters; in fact, he regards the evidence as "irresistible". Eberhard Nestle just as uniformly adopts τῳ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς. Swete adopts the former reading for the first, second and fourth letters, the latter for all the rest. The evidence is too evenly balanced to warrant anyone to speak with an air of finality. Fortunately whichever way it is read makes little or no difference exegetically. It is a mere matter of style, though even that is not unimportant.

Above the Emperor's Proconsul, with his **"right of the sword"**, *jus gladii*, stands the Sovereign of sovereigns, with His "sharp two-edged sword". Ramsay: "He that hath the absolute and universal authority speaks to the Church

situated in the city where official authority dwells". Charles: "The sword that proceeds from the mouth of the Son of Man is simply a symbol of His judicial authority". Meyer: "According to Pliny, Pergamos was the seat of a Roman supreme court". Ramsay: "Prisoners were carried from all parts of the Province to Pergamum for trial and sentence before the authority who possessed the right of the sword, *jus gladii*, the power of life and death, viz., the Roman Proconsul of Asia". The question was—Should they honor the Emperor and worship him, or acknowledge and worship the Christ, who was not only their Sovereign, but the Emperor's? The epithet is short, yet it sets before us Christ, as the One to whom authority, real unlimited authority backed by omnipotence, has been given, compared with whom Emperors are but as worms of the dust. While the present verse, however, brings into prominence the prerogative of Christ as Universal Sovereign, whose right it is to **reward or to punish** (the sword is δίστομον), the sixteenth verse lays emphasis on the fairness and the reasonableness with which His authority is exercised. There the sword is the 'sword of His mouth'. Condemnation comes through a disregard of the truth. And this holds good equally, whether in the domain of civic life or of ecclesiastical. In ἔχων the purpose is held in abeyance, as it were. It is as though things for the moment were at a standstill; there is longsuffering in the word; space for repentance; the Sovereign is waiting to be gracious. Had judgment and wrath been immediately pending κρατῶν would have been the word to use, though then perhaps the sword would have had to be in the hand.

13. Not παροικεῖς, but κατοικεῖς—not **'where you are sojourning for a time'**, but **'where you are settled down to stay'**, even 'where Satan **is settled down to stay'** (κατοικεῖ). How often we console ourselves with the thought that we will soon move out of forbidding settlements or away from unpleasant moral surroundings, whereas the fact may be that we have been placed in these very environments with a view to our shining as lights among those who are sitting in darkness! As Swete says, *in loco*, "There is no possibility of escaping from the situation; the local Church could not migrate in a body, and Satan would not quit his vantage ground". Here Satan had established himself for good, had located his θρόνος, his **chair of state,** and from this seat of authority he was using his persuasive arts on the Pergamenians, saying to them, as he had said to our Lord, "All these things will I give (you), if (you) will fall down and worship me".

Specially to be noted is κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου. **It** is a vigorous verb, and it is in the present tense. **'You are keeping, tenaciously keeping, my Name's honor and glory uppermost** in thought and purpose day by day, right along and all the time'. Precisely here is the characteristic distinction which marks the difference between Pergamos and Ephesus. Ephesus began by working solely for the honor of the Name, but at a definite moment of its history it fell away from that high ideal. Pergamos, whatever other shortcomings it may have been chargeable with, never wavered in its purpose to glorify Christ. Nor did it deny the faith which it had in Jesus when the temptation to do so was overwhelming — Καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντίπας

(even in the days of Antipas). Then what follows should be regarded as parenthetical, a mere remark on the side—"He was my witness, my faithful witness, who was killed among you that befriended him, where Satan's homestead is". Παρά has the warmth of friendship in it. The Christians of Pergamos were as loyal as Antipas. In spirit they were martyrs even as he. Ephesus at its best was not superior to Pergamos at its best. They were neck and neck. Moreover, Antipas was likely only the first, and perhaps the most conspicuous, of a long list of martyrs. Ramsay: "The subsequent chapters of the Revelation, which tell of the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, show what were the real facts. That one name should stand as representative of the whole list is entirely in the style of the Apocalypse. . . . It is not even certain that Antipas was a member of that congregation: the words are not inconsistent with the possibility that Antipas was brought up for trial from some other city, and 'killed *among* the Pergamenians'."

14, 15. Charles: "In ὀλίγα only one thing is meant, though the writer speaks of that one thing generically: cf. WM 219". Moreover, that one thing, though **minute** (ὀλίγον) in its beginnings, is fatal in its results It consists in Balaam's insidious principle of compromise. And it has them **under its power**—κρατοῦντας. This compromise, says Ramsay, "affected most of all the cultured and well-to-do classes in the Church, those who had most temptation to retain all that they could of the established social order and customs of the Graeco-Roman world, and who by their more elaborate education had been trained to take

a somewhat artificial view of life and to reconcile contradictory principles in practical conduct through subtle philosophical reasoning". But any argument for any compromise on any moral issue is simply one of "the deep things of Satan", as this and the following letter conclusively show. It has its rise in a paganistic proclivity, and its only legitimate outcome is gross carnality. Hence we have here **"the doctrine of Balaam"** (τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ), which is generic, and **"the doctrine of the Nicolaitans"** (τὴν διδαχὴν Νικολαϊτῶν) which is specific. The broad principle of Balaam's "error" becomes articulate in the *sect* of the Nicolaitans. Evidently the Nicolaitans were well known. No description of them was necessary in Asia Minor at the time. And as Alford says, there is "no sort of reason for interpreting the name otherwise than historically. . . . If we do not gain trustworthy accounts of the sect from elsewhere, why not . . . be content with what we know of them from these two passages?" Also exegetically: "The whole sense of the passage (vv. 14, 15) is against the idea of the identity of the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans; and would be in fact destroyed by it." So, substantially, Swete: "On the whole it seems best to fall back upon the supposition that a party bearing this name existed in Asia when the Apocalypse was written, whether it owed its origin to Nicolaus of Antioch, which is not improbable (see Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 297, n.), or to some other false teacher of that name". It was a period in which individuals and groups, who wanted to mix Paganism and Christianity, were springing up everywhere. Hippolytus (*Refutation of All Heresies*, xxiv) tells us that such fungous growths

were "too numerous" to mention, and that Nicolaus was the cause of a "wide-spread combination of these wicked men". There was a "combination", a "sect", a "party" of Nicolaitans. That ἐκεῖ of v. 14 is very significant—You have **there,** even at Pargamos, where my Name is so scrupuously honored, and where you stood so loyally by my martyr Antipas, *even there* you have the compromising Balaamites. Thus, I say, you really have, **even you** (καὶ σύ), those who hold the doctrine of the sect of the Nicolaitans. The ἐκεῖ (**there**) recalls Ephesus by way of contrast; the καὶ σύ (**even you**) glances backward toward their devotion to Christ's Name. Pergamos, whose chief end, all along, had been Christ's honor, had been tolerating Nicolaitans, whereas Ephesus, which had latterly fallen short of that ideal, still continued to hate and exclude them.

16. Repentance was enjoined upon the whole Pergamene Church; those who were tainted with Nicolaitanism needed to repent, and those who were lax enough to allow such to remain in the Church needed to repent. By repentance the whole Church would be moved to grapple with the task of reclaiming the still curable, and of excluding the incurables—yet always in the hope that in case of exclusion the spirit, as Paul says (I Cor. 5:5), might be "saved in the day of the Lord Jesus". Failure to repent would be followed by doleful consequences, and not in the far distant future either, but immediately. "I am coming to thy disadvantage right away", says Christ. The present tense, followed by the *dat. incommod.*, and emphasized by ταχύ, leaves nothing unsaid. The time of πολεμήσω is

determined by the time of ἔρχομαι. It amounts to this: "I will be there at once, and will begin to fight against you as soon as I arrive". In fact, this very letter was, as it were, the first stroke from the "sword of His mouth". It brought them up short—that is, the compromisers. With them (μετ' αὐτῶν) in particular would Christ contend—in fact, was even now contending. Should the Church hesitate to act instantly, it would be to its instant disadvantage. Its good name was at stake. Would it allow itself to be branded as fearful and faithless, and unwilling to bear reproach? The world would but treat it with the deeper scorn for its cowardice, and the church at large would be brought into disrepute by its recreant representative at the governmental centre of the Province of Asia.

17. To him that keeps overcoming, moment by moment, will I give, at the separate moments of his overcoming, to eat "of the hidden manna". What a hunt this "hidden manna" has given the expositors! As I read them one by one, I feel like Festus—"Much learning hath made thee mad". A portion of manna was placed in a golden vessel and laid up in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of holies (Ex. 16: 31–34). As long as it remained in that receptacle, it was, in so far at least as the people in general were concerned, the "hidden manna". Christ (John 6: 22–40) declares Himself to be the real manna. While He was making the declaration, He could be seen, and His voice could be heard. At that time He was not "hidden". When He ascended from Olivet, He disappeared behind "the veil" in "the holiest of all", and was thenceforth unseen and invisible—the "hidden manna". What is the

use of making an easy thing difficult, a patent thing obscure? Nor is the reference here to some festal occasion in the world to come. The man who is "overcoming" is working, *is working hard*, and he needs the Bread of Life not after he is dead, but before it. Every genuine Christian feeds on Christ daily, *has* to. The future in δώσω is fixed in its reference by the present in νικῶντι. If I do a good work today, it is not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me; and it is because I am feeding on Him that I can do it, for apart from Him I can do nothing. Let us check up the meaning here by weighing the language in the scales of our own personal experience.

Much, too, has been said about the "white stone" and the "new name". Here again we must be on our guard against the cryptic and obscure. Presumably it was intended that the people to whom this letter was addressed should understand it. Otherwise what would have been the use in writing it? Ramsay (*Letters*, p. 304): "The truth is that the white pebble with the New Name was not an exact reproduction of any custom or thing in the social usage of the time. It was a new conception, devised for this new purpose; but it was only a working up into a new form of familiar things and customs, and it was therefore completely intelligible to every reader in the Asian Churches. It had analogies with many things, though it was not an exact reproduction of any of them". Here, with others, we may quote Ovid (Met. xv. 41)—

> "Mos erat antiquis niveis atrisque lapillis,
> His damnare reos illis absolvere culpa".

With this custom, therefore, of acquitting with the white and condemning with the black stone, everybody in Asia Minor was familiar, and especially at Pergamos where the courts of justice sat. Moreover, from Pliny (Ep. vi. 11. 3.) we learn that the white stone was the emblem of felicity,—"O diem laetum notandumque mihi candidissimo calculo". Manifestly these two familiar conceptions are at bottom one. Acquittal inevitably brings joy in its wake. There is ecstasy in that line of Pliny's. He seems to be actually caressing that little pebble. "O happy day for me, O sweet red-letter day not to be forgotten, with my white, white stone!" Now we must not lose sight of the fact that Christ is here talking to the Church of Pergamos about exercising discipline. And the world we may be sure, would not be slow to **condemn** (damnare) the Church with its **black vote** (ater lapillus). They were not to be disconcerted by that fact, however, for Christ, on the other hand, would not fail to **acquit them** (absolvere) with His **white vote** (niveus lapillus, ψῆφος λευκή),—O diem laetum notandumque!

When to this is added that other custom connected with the *tessera hospitalis*, which would suggest itself instantly at the mention of the "new name", the picture, it seems to me, is complete. The approval of the Lord Jesus, with the consequent blessedness which His approbation brings home to the soul, plus the conscious increment of character of which the soul becomes aware on resolving to do what is right—that, in a word, is what confronts us here. The "new name" is not νέον, not **something now gotten for the first time**; it is καινόν—**a name** which in a way is **perfectly familiar, but** which has been **recently expanded** in its sig-

nificance so as to cover a corresponding expansion of character. It is a name which, since it broadens co-extensively with character, will become ever increasingly richer and more and more significant until the soul shall have finally attained to its own individual measure "of the stature of the fulness of Christ", and then, when the bounds of perfection shall have been reached, will admit the bearer not to some paltry festival in the temple of Augustus, but to that other banquet where the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall dispense the hospitalities of heaven to the innumerable hosts of the redeemed for evermore. The remarks of Plumptre, quoted by Jacobs in his added notes in *Meyer*, are so sane and so excellent that it would be a mistake not to transcribe them in full. Plumptre adopts the view of Ewald, "who", he says, "sees in the **stone** or ψῆφος of the promise the *tessera hospitalis*, by which, in virtue of forms or characters inscribed upon it, he who possessed it could claim from the friend who gave it, at any distance of time, a frank and hearty welcome. What I would suggest", he continues, "as an addition to this rises out of the probability, almost certainty, that some such *tessera* or ticket—a stone with the name of the guest written on it—was given to those who were invited to partake, within the precincts of the temple, of the feast that consisted wholly, or in part, of the meat that had been offered as a sacrifice. On this view the second part of the promise is brought in harmony with the first, and is made more directly appropriate: he who had the courage to refuse that *tessera* to the feast that defiled should receive another that would admit him to the supper of the Great King. The inner truth that lies below

the outward imagery would seem to be, that the conqueror, when received at the heavenly feast, should find upon the stone, or *tessera*, that gave him the right of entrance, a 'new name', the token of a character transformed and perfected,—a name the full significance of which should be known only to him who was conscious of the transformation, just as, in the experiences of human life, 'the heart knoweth his own bitterness, and the stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy' (Prov. 14:10)". Cf. Wordsworth, *in loco*, to the same effect.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

To the angel of the Church in Pergamos write: These things says He who has the sword of swords—sharp to pierce the heart with conviction of sin, edged to vindicate righteousness and execute judgment and wrath: I know where your home is located, and designedly located, as a providential fixture, namely, at the very spot where Satan's throne is; I know that you are holding my Name before you continuously as the sole object to be honored in all you do; I know that at that signally crucial moment in your history you did not deny the faith you had in me—in the days of Antipas, I mean; (he certainly was a star witness for me, faithful to the very end, whom you to your credit befriended so nobly at his trial and martyrdom, right on the ground where Satan is a fixity.) Albeit I have a few things against you, summed up in the fact that you have there, even at Pergamos, those who are holding in reality to the corrosive, insidious, lecherous teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the

children of Israel, to eat things offered to idols, and to commit fornication. And so it comes to pass that you, whose chaste ideal would lead one to expect more of you than of the Church of Ephesus that has partially lost that ideal, that even you are tolerating those among you who have become the exponents of the well-known doctrine of the sect of the Nicolaitans—an organization, as you are aware, in which the particularly odious, yet increasingly popular, principles of Balaam are constantly coming to visiblity in unreportable licentiousness. Are you willing to drop below the Ephesians, who hate the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, even as I hate it? Repent therefore. Otherwise I have no option, according to the inherent law of rectitude, but to come, right away, to your disadvantage, and I warn you that at the very moment I arrive I will begin to fight against you—for the compromisers, remember, contaminate the whole Church—I will begin to fight against you with the sword of my mouth. He that has ears let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church at large. To him who keeps overcoming uninterruptedly—to him, I say, will I give the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone; it is a stone upon which a new name has been written—a name which, since it is written in experience, no one, except him who receives it, can sound the significance of and enjoy, even a conscience void of offense toward God.

Chapter Two, verses 12–17.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LETTER TO PERGAMOS

A Message Concerning the Place of Christ in Civil Government

IT is important at the outset to notice the fact that Pergamos had been a seat of royalty for almost four unbroken centuries when this letter was being written to its Church. Geographically as well as otherwise it was adapted to the honor. "Beyond all other sites in Asia Minor", says Sir William Ramsay, "it gives the traveller the impression of a royal city, the home of authority: the rocky hill on which it stands is so huge, and dominates the broad plain of the Caicus so proudly and boldly. . . . The rock rules over and as it were plants its foot upon a great valley; and its summit looks over the southern mountains which bound the valley, until the distant lofty peaks south of the Gulf of Smyrna, and especially the beautiful twin peaks now called the Two Brothers, close in the outlook. Far beneath lies the sea, quite fifteen miles away, and beyond it the foreign soil of Lesbos: the view of other lands, the presence of hostile powers, the need of constant care and watchfulness, all the duties of kingship are forced on the attention of him who sits enthroned on that huge rock. There is here nothing to suggest evanescence, mutability, and uncertainty, as at Sardis or Ephesus; the inevitable impression is of permanence, strength, sure

authority and great size". It is true of course, as Ramsay adds, that "something of the personal and subjective element must be mixed up with such impressions", but must it not have been the dominance of just such impressions, after all, that commended the choice of Pergamos as the capital of Asia? There are some things which men cannot help but see. And the language of the letter warrants the opinion that the royal characteristics of the city, the "large effects that troop with majesty", had not escaped the eye of John.

At all events, it was in fact what it had the appearance and suitability of being. For a century and a half, dating from 282 B.C., Pergamos had been the capital of the Pergamenian Kingdom, the seat of authority, the guardian of the throne, the home of the Attalids. At the expiration of that time the whole kingdom was voluntarily bequeathed to the Romans by Attalus III., so that from the year 133 B.C. "all the land on this side of Taurus", as they were accustomed to speak of it, came into the possession of the Empire, and as a part of the Empire was henceforth known as the Province of Asia. Of this vast and wealthy Province of the Roman Empire Pergamos continued to be the capital. The Proconsul, who came from the Tiber as the Plenipotentiary of the Emperor and the Senate, and who was clothed with "the power of the sword", and was the arbiter accordingly of life and death, landed always at Ephesus, frequently visited other prominent cities no doubt on his way to the capital, but never began his official career, properly speaking, until he sat, as the Emperor's substitute, in the courts of Pergamos. Pergamos was still the royal city—the city

now through which the Roman Empire expressed its sovereign will.

It was more than that. It was the seat of the Commune, or Council, of Asia. With the origin of this powerful and important assembly we have nothing at present to do. Suffice it to say that when Augustus became the head of the Empire he found it ready at hand to be utilized for the advantage of Rome. To issue orders or enact a law was beyond the bounds of its jurisdiction. It could suggest and plan and recommend, but its authority to act depended on its license from Rome. And yet it was not a mere figurehead by any manner of means. It was commissioned, to all intents and purposes, to manage the Province. Between the Imperial government and the Commune of Asia the unanimity was complete and continuous. Augustus, who had delivered the people of the Province from the rapacities which had prevailed during the latter years of the Republic, was regarded as a Divinity, and was worshipped devoutly as God incarnate, the Saviour of men. So also with the subsequent Emperors; each was regarded as a sort of "Immanuel", a God with us. Into this conception the Commune of Asia had entered heart and soul, sincerely and fervently. It was an assembly that could be trusted; its loyalty was unique and unlimited.

Now the Commune of Asia, like the men of Athens, was "very religious". It was the body that had in charge the affairs, as we might say, of the Imperial Church. In the conduct of such matters it was in its element. Here it could display its originality and zeal, even a shade of independence perhaps—if such a thing could ever be. It had

to keep the peace between the native Anatolian conceptions of religion, and the more humane conceptions of the cultured Grecian mind, and the newer Imperial conceptions that were rising, as it were, out of the sea from the direction of the Tiber. And the task was not without its niceties. Men of those days, we must remember, had their own ideas, as we have ours. In Ephesus, for example, the old Anatolian spirit prevailed. There they worshipped Artemis—"Diana of the Ephesians". And they were not indifferent about it either. Neither, on the other hand, were the "Asiarchs"—the Ephesian members of the Commune—for they took sides against the devotees of Artemis and acted as the "friends" of Paul. In fact, it was on account of their religious views and preferences that the Ephesians lost the privilege of being allowed to erect the second Imperial temple on the soil of Asia. "You are devotees of Artemis", the Senate said; and the honor went to Smyrna. Thus the aborigines of Asia, and the Greeks who overspread their territory and gained the ascendancy wherever they went, and the Romans who held the reins of government, had each their respective convictions, and were not disinclined to maintain them. It was with these and similar religious conditions that the Commune had to deal. It was natural, therefore, indeed it was inevitable, that Christianity should come under its survey. And it was not without its arguments. As it held its sessions in none but cities that could boast an Imperial temple, its only meeting place for more than forty years must have been in Pergamos, and the gods of Pergamos were Zeus the Saviour, Athena the Bringer of Victory, Dionysus the

Guide, and Aesculapius the Great Physician,—all of which qualities, the Commune held, had become incarnate in His majesty, the Emperor, the Divine Augustus, and in his Imperial successors. How stupid, then, it must have seemed to the Commune that the Christians of the Province should set the lowly Nazarene above the Majesty of Rome, and should worship Him, instead of Caesar, as the Sovereign of the universe, the Saviour of men, the Guide of life, the invincible Conqueror, and the Great Physician! And when they would refuse to participate in the games at the annual festivals because of their loyalty to a man who had been crucified as a criminal, we can easily imagine how the exasperation of the Commune would come to be well nigh uncontrollable. It was a point of honor with the Commune to be able to report a united people in the support of the Imperial worship, and to bring about such a state of affairs was the "head and front" of its commission from the Eternal City on the Tiber.

Pergamos, therefore, was the local habitation of the Imperial sovereignty in the Province of Asia. Moreover, in the days of Domitian, when John was writing, the claim to divinity on the part of the Emperor had touched the very heights of effrontery and reached the limits of blasphemy. Domitian decreed that the people should address him during his lifetime as "Our Lord and our God". And Pergamos was the city from which the decree would be issued to the Province of Asia. And the Empire's agent in issuing it would be the Commune. Accordingly it is easy to see why John speaks of Pergamos as the place "where Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwelleth".

It was the place where Satan stepped into the place of Jehovah and said, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me". It is remarkable—and the circumstance seems to be as old as the human race—how little use men, as soon as they enter the political world, are able to find for the honor or the precepts of the only living and true God. In the field of politics men have always appeared to think it possible to gather "figs of thistles". And yet, although what has been gathered in sixty centuries has never once been figs, the modern mind, to all intents and purposes, continues to cherish the same fond hope as witlessly as ever. The state must have nothing to do with Christ. Here at least He must be retired into desuetude. And still we look for figs! How long will it take the world to learn that the "throne" must always have an occupant, and that the occupant must either be Beelzebub or Christ? Rightful sovereignty is not lodged in any human being, nor in any nation of human beings; it is lodged in Jesus Christ, and only in Him. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth". When men allot to human sovereignty the position and honor and acknowledgments that belong to the sovereign Son of God, it brings the friends of Christ into an inescapable dilemma. Whether they will or not, they have to choose. It was so at Pergamos, and throughout the Province. For the Christians everywhere it was either "Lord Jesus" or "Lord Caesar". At Pergamos they had held "fast" to the Name, even as Antipas had; for, that he had been brought from some other part of the Province to the very spot where Satan dwelt, in order that he might be tried and sentenced to death before the Com-

mune in the presence of the Proconsul, where Satan's throne was, can hardly be questioned. He was put to death "among them", which, as the Greek preposition implicitly signifies, was as much as to say that their loyalty and faithfulness were of a kind with his. He was martyred, but they were not ashamed to identify themselves with him and participate in his reproach. Neither the Beast rising up out of the sea nor the indigenous Beast—no, nor the two of them together—could make the Christians of Pergamos swerve by so much as a hair's breadth in the matter of fidelity to their invisible King. When Caesar said to them, "All these things will I give you, if you will but fall down and worship me", the answer he received was like Christ's reply to Satan, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve". They took their stand, even though it might mean that they would have to seal their testimony with their blood.

And yet with nothing less than this could the Lord be satisfied. It is strikingly significant, when we grasp the situation, that He announces Himself to the Church at Pergamos as "He that hath the sharp two-edged sword". The Roman Proconsul might come to Pergamos clothed by the Emperor with "the power of the sword", but he would find on his arrival that a Greater than the Emperor was there. Through the Proconsul the Emperor could kill or keep alive, but above the Emperor, visible to the inner eye of the loyal heart, stood the Christ, apart from whose ordering no Emperor could lift a hand. Not that the Christ would slaughter the enemies of His church at the moment and on the spot. He is great enough to move

with majestic slowness. The sword is not in the hand of Christ; it is the sword of His mouth. It is the Word of God. It is the proclamation of the truth—of the truth, first of all, that salvation is offered to all men everywhere, including the Emperor and his whole vast Empire with its Eternal City on the Tiber, by the blood of Jesus; and then of the truth on its other edge, that as often as this offer is spurned or disregarded, the men that do it, whoever they may be, will have to face this same Jesus, whose grace and lovingkindness they have scorned, as their inexorable and righteous Judge, when the great day of His wrath shall have come. By one edge of the sword the path is cleared into life and immortality, by the other the multitudes who still prefer the broad way that leadeth to destruction are cut off in their iniquities to be banished into outer darkness. The sword is the symbol of that authority which is exercised in the interests of the truth. What the Lord Christ says, He has a right to say; and what He says will come to pass. And woe betide the man or the nation that ventures to usurp His authority, or attempts to assume the place and the functions that belong to Him.

In a few respects, however, the Church of Pergamos was marring its splendid record by falling short in the matter of consistent conduct. It had within its membership certain persons who held tenaciously to the policy of Balaam, that keen old student of human nature who taught Balak how to scandalize the children of Israel. The story is intensely interesting, and a clear apprehension of its cardinal significance is indispensable to an accurate appreciation of the present reference. Balak king of Moab had

summoned "the son of Beor" from "the mountains of the east" for the specified purpose of having him pronounce a curse upon the hosts of Israel. Balaam's name, accordingly, must have been widely known. As a soothsayer he must already have become illustrious. He was proud of his reputation, and nothing could persuade him to endanger it. The secret of his success is patent in the narrative. It lay in the fact that he was scrupulously careful never to foretell anything but what gave next to a self-evident promise of happening. Even should Balak offer him his "house full of silver and gold", it would not induce him to go beyond the auspices, to say less or more. He was a real first-class wizard, and his chief concern was to magnify his office and lift the art of necromancy into high esteem. In the present instance he was well supplied with good material. He had mastered the meaning of the blessings which Jacob had pronounced on the head of his sons. He had caught, in a measure, their spiritual import. And so when Balak took him to a high place from which he could overlook the fourth part of that vast encampment, the part that lay farthest to the west, and his eyes fell upon the two magnificent tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph, it brought to his mind that the essential element of the ancient patriarchal blessing centred in the circumstance that Joseph in his inner life and character was a man who was "separate" from his brethren, was a man to whose instinctive purity the meanness and duplicities and malicious cruelties and numberless other moral maladies of his brethren were but as a foreign substance. "Look, Balak", he cries,

under the thrill of seeing this sublime principle of religion exemplified at its perfectest, "look, it is a people that dwelleth alone, not reckoned among the nations of the earth, living separate and apart from its licentious surroundings, uncontaminated by the sins of the age, pure, free, imposing, invincible. Can you not see, O Balak, how impossible it would be for me to curse such a people? It would cost me my reputation as a soothsayer. As long as the people of Israel maintains its integrity and abstains from every form of complicity with the abominations of the world around it, its vitality will continue, its life will be imperishable, and its progress cannot even be retarded".

But Balak is persistent. "Come with me," he says, "to another coign of vantage and view the encampment from a different angle." For Balak's purposes, however, the second position is worse and worse. For now, for the first time, their eyes rest on "the Tabernacle of Testimony" overshadowed by the "pillar of cloud". Balaam becomes tremulous with ecstasy. "Balak", he says, "it is the symbol of the presence of Jehovah; the Lord his God is with him; the Most High Himself is an inmate of every tent on yonder plain; the pillar of cloud and fire is but His way of saying that He sees no iniquity in Jacob, no perverseness in Israel; it would be futile to curse such a people; the omens are adverse; there is no enchantment against Jacob; there is no divination against Israel; those hosts are the friends of Jehovah; God is in the midst of them, they cannot be moved".

Balak wishes that Balaam could at least be silent, but resolves to take him to "the top of Peor", whence for the

first time, as the description intimates, they could survey the encampment as a whole. They are looking north, so that Balaam is able now to see all the tents of Israel "according to their tribes", and especially, far to the right, closely hugging the foothills on the east, the princely tribe of Judah, whose province it would be to hold the sceptre until Shiloh came. The scene presents itself to Balaam's imagination under the figure of a rich, spacious, carefully cultivated garden of God. The long avenues of tents running parallel with the Jordan look to him like "trees of lign-aloes which the Lord had planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters". He is even now in the presence of Shiloh's handiwork; honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are visible on the plain; his thought sweeps forward through the coming ages; everything incidental or adventitious disappears, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah occupies the centre of the scene. "Ah", cries Balaam, "I see HIM, but not now; I behold HIM, but not nigh". Balaam saw in vision the Christ that was to be, the Messiah in whom in the process of time all the fulness of the Godhead bodily was to dwell, the "Perfect Life in perfect labor writ", the criterion of manhood for the human race. It was enough. To curse such a people while it was using the means prescribed by Jehovah Himself for the attainment of such an ideal would be but suicidal. He will not do it, though Balak should offer to pile him up emoluments as high as Peor. Under no conditions must his good name as a soothsayer be hazarded. He will bless the people, and not simply save, but make, his reputation. And what he says amounts to this: "O ye

sons of Israel, keep yourselves unspotted from the world, hold yourselves aloof from all companionship with ungodly nations; 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate', saith the Lord, 'and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters', saith the Lord Almighty".

And yet Balaam's heart is heavy. It grieves him to think that none of Moab's shining gold is to be carried back with him into the mountains of Mesopotamia And so,

"With one auspicious, and one dropping eye",

he sets about to seek a new solution. Nor is he unequal to the task, for we read that "through the counsel of Balaam" the children of Israel were led "to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor". It is easy, from the recorded facts, to reproduce his line of reasoning. "Balak", he would say, "as long as the nation of Israel keeps itself separate from and untarnished by the wickedness of surrounding nations, God Himself will make His abode in the heart of the encampment as the Companion of His people, and the result will be holiness in life and strength and beauty of character throughout the tribes. To curse a people living thus would be folly. But why not change your tactics? Why not assume a friendly attitude and cultivate the acquaintance of Israel? Why not get them interested in your system of sacrificing, in your mode of worship? Make a feast for them, invite them to Baal-Peor, inveigle them into becoming partakers with you in your sacrifices, induce them to bow the knee to Chemosh and thus to reverence him as the equal of Jehovah. You

can see what that would mean. It would involve a complete reversal of their present state and standing. If you succeed, they will cease to be 'a people that dwelleth alone', for they will be mingling with the Moabites and the Midianites both socially and in matters of religion; then, as a consequence, God will leave them, for He will withdraw His gracious presence and give them over to their own devices and to the imaginations of their own hearts; and then, finally, the outcome of it all will be that they will lose their character, and will become so vile that God Himself in righteous wrath will crush them to the earth." And so it was that Balaam "taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication".

Balaam was one of the world's great men. He had a colossal intellect. In him Moses found a foeman worthy of his steel. He was a master in the science of ethics. He had insight enough to perceive that Israel's God was a God of immaculate holiness, and consequently that in His eyes the slightest departure from rectitude was an infinite sin. To his mind it had become perfectly clear that with Jehovah the line between right and wrong was absolute. He had come to comprehend what men in all ages of the world have been so slow to learn, namely, that the thin edge of the wedge is of precisely the same character morally as the thick end is. So he counselled compromise. He knew that if Israel would but hesitate, would but stop to dally, would but begin to underestimate the ethical requirement of keeping themselves "separate" from the religious beliefs and rites and practices of the Moabites, the rest of the story

would be but a mere matter of time. And he was right. God hates sin in the infinitesimal as much as He does when its proportions become mountainous. After all, it is all in the embryo. God is not handicapped by the limitations of pragmatism. He is not man that He should have to wait to see how sin will work. With Him, sin, however minute, is but a skeleton with a scythe, a death's head, a catastrophe. And the purpose of the Apocalypse is to emphasize this truth and make it transparent.

The Nicolaitans, then, were the compromisers, the Balaamites, of their day. At bottom, it was the same old question of Baal-Peor that was confronting the Pergamene Church. How far could church members go in the direction of countenancing the pagan worship? At what point would inconsistency begin? The élite would be anxious not to draw the line too rigidly. The further up in society they might think themselves to be the more sensitive they would become. Why should they lose caste in influential circles unless they had to? They set themselves to work to formulate a principle of action. And the principle they hit upon was the same as the one Balaam furnished Balak with. Nor was there any lack of tenacity on their part once they had made up their minds. The word employed indicates that the principle they adopted "governed" their conduct. They would not recede. Men who abandon the ideal of a perfect moral standard seldom do. And their argument would be plausible. It always is. They would be able first of all, piously, to cite apostolic authority. Had not Paul explicitly permitted the eating of "meats offered to idols"? Yes, so long as the question involved was nothing

more than a mere matter of food; no, positively and perennially, the instant that "eating" might become the occasion of bringing the moral quality of the act into question. These compromisers could say: "It is certainly proper to buy meat "in the shambles" and eat it at home, or, on being invited out, in the homes of our friends, provided the moral question remains unmooted." And up to this point of course, they would be right. "But it stands to reason", they would say, "that eating is eating wherever it is done—in our own homes, in our friends' homes, or at festivals. It is as unnecessary to raise the moral issue at a feast in honor of the Emperor as it is to raise it in our own homes or in those of our friends". They would remember and quote Paul, where he says, "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one"; but they would just as judiciously forget to quote him, where he says, "Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" You may say that this is nothing but conjecture. Well, as to the mode of expression it is; but the conjectural mode of expression, I reply, is amply warranted by historical facts. At the close of the first century, while John was yet living, and was in fact writing the Apocalypse, heretics were recommending that professing Christians should eat meats offered to idols, precisely in the manner which Paul's instructions forbade. These heretics were known as the Gnostics. They aimed to bring about a coalescence between Christianity and Paganism. "They eat without scruple the meats which have been sacrificed to idols",

says Irenaeus, "thinking that they do not defile themselves thereby, and whenever there is among the heathen a festival prepared in honor of the idols, they are the first to be there". Nor did they stop with compromising themselves theoretically, as we might say, for Irenaeus is careful to add that "these Gnostics give themselves up to the lusts of the flesh with greediness", And Eusebius tells us that Basilides taught explicitly that it was proper to eat meats offered to idols and to deny the faith, in order to escape persecution and save one's self from martyrdom. That is to say again that the thin edge of the wedge is the same in principle as the thick end is. The initial compromise involves the whole question, both on the side of loyalty in principle and purity in practice. And this all sane men know instinctively. The wickedest kind of a man, if you engage him in an argument on a moral question, will cite some plausible instance where the point at issue is only remotely—in fact, almost imperceptibly—involved; and then, if you concede him that, he will turn upon you and insist that he has won the day. And he has. There is no middle ground between right and wrong. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils". The two are antipodal. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?"

The essence therefore of Balaamism or Nicolaitanism—intrinsically one—consists in harboring a conciliatory frame of mind toward moral obliquity. To compromise with any kind of sin, or any system of evil, for any end however speciously conceived, is fatal. It is infinitely unchristlike.

It ends in debauchery. It is at once the stealthiest and most effective agency that can be utilized looking toward the ruination of the church of God on earth.

What then should the Church of Pergamos have done? The answer lies before us in the figure of "the sharp two-edged sword". It should have exercised discipline. By the sword of the mouth it should have stated the truth perspicuously. To this truth it should have required its members to give an unequivocal adherence. In case of deliberate and persistent refusal it should have purged its roll. Of course, this process, to begin with, would have meant decimation. Then, as it would have affected especially, in all likelihood, the so-called élite, it would have been extremely unpopular. It would have invited the censure of the world at large, of the Commune in particular and eventually of the Senate and the Emperor. Evidently the Pergamene Church hesitated to face the ordeal. By its hesitancy it had become contaminated. Christ calls it to repentance. It will have to carry the conflict to its consummation, will have to "overcome", as the promised reward leads us to perceive, the fear of depletion, the dread of becoming unpopular, and the subconscious persuasion that numbers count independently of character. As the promised reward, I say, should lead us to perceive; for the significance of the "hidden manna", and the "white stone" with the "new name", is not so undiscoverable, after all, as the lack of unanimity in explaining the figures of speech might tend to suggest. We shall find our feet on solid ground, it seems to me, if our exposition, in the final test, yields itself with readiness to the touchstone of historical

fact and common everyday experience. The element of timeliness is a fundamental prerequisite to correct results.

Manna was Israel's bread in the wilderness. It was their means of sustenance. Without it their ranks would have been thinned; the strong would have become weak; the women and children would have perished. With no manna to feed them it is doubtful whether even a remnant of that multitudinous host would ever have reached the land of promise. It was the thing that nourished them. It was a tangible evidence of the favor of God. In this way it passed over from the physical to the spiritual. It gave them courage and hope as well as muscle. It assured them that in spite of diminution by death on their journey through the desert they would win, and that, since they were thus so signally supported on the way by the immediate intervention of the hand of God, the church, of which they were the living representatives, would eventually weather every storm and leave the world and every kind of worldliness behind it to grovel in the dust of ignominious defeat. While they were living on manna they were not living "by bread alone", but on the implicit promise as well, which the manna carried in itself, that Jehovah would see them through to victory. Indeed, it was because of this very fact, it was because of this spiritual aspect of the matter, that the manna became so significant. It was for this reason that an "omerful of it" was placed in the Holy of holies and laid up "before the Testimony, to be kept". This was that "hidden manna" by which they had an ever present reminder that Jehovah was their fountain of life,

the source of their strength, their "very present help in trouble".

The Church of Pergamos was in like situation. It, too, as a part of the church in its entirety, was on its pilgrimage through a hostile wilderness of untoward surroundings. At the instant in question, moreover, it was confronted by a delicate duty—a duty which, if faithfully performed, would weaken it numerically, and from a wordly point of view influentially. Would there be any recompense for the loss that was sure to follow the act of discipline? Could there be any compensation for such a step? What would support them in the hour of trial when their course of action would make them a target for the obloquy of the Commune and the Empire? To questionings like these Christ's reply, in substance, is—"Institute process against the Nicolaitans without delay; conduct the trial unflinchingly, but in the spirit of love and gentleness; make the truth plain, and require its acceptance; you will suffer no real loss, for I will more than make it up to you by giving you to eat of the hidden manna". John's Gospel is our commentary here. The sixth chapter records the feeding of the five thousand. Seemingly, for the time being, this large and eager group were His friends, and were minded to count themselves among His followers. But Jesus knew them better than they knew themselves. They had no love for Him; it was the "loaves and fishes" that they loved. They were carnal, altogether of the earth earthy, as reprehensible at bottom as were the Nicolaitans, who were willing to compromise the honor of Christ by eating meats offered to idols. Christ could not have such men within the

circle reserved for His disciples. They had to be ejected. Accordingly, He set Himself immediately to the task of doing it; and He did it, let it be noted, "by the sword of His mouth". In fact, He made the truth so plain that in this case they ejected themselves. Incidentally they introduced the subject of the manna. Jesus assured them that He was Himself that manna, that "Bread of life", and that if any man would feed upon Him he would have all his wants supplied. If these men were sincere, if they had really come to Him because the Father had given them to Him, He would "in no wise cast them out". He would work for them, and with them, and in them, and enable them to conquer every enemy, and would "raise them up at the last day". But if they were coming to Him for nothing but "loaves and fishes", they would have to be excluded. They would not be a help; they would be an incubus, a menace, a curse to the cause. When Jesus had thus set the matter before them in its true light, we read that they "murmured" at Him. In other words, by "the sword of His mouth", Jesus forced them to step outside of the circle of His followers, seeing that as a matter of fact they belonged to those who were without. Discipline merely puts a man where he belongs.

It is easy, then, in the light of John's Gospel, to understand the reference to the "hidden manna". The men of Galilee, to whom Christ announced Himself to be the true manna, could see His face, hear His voice, touch His hand. Now He had passed into the Holy of holies, into heaven itself, and was unseen and invisible. Thus by His ascension He had become "the hidden manna". The Pergamene

Church needed to feed upon Him now, needed to dwell on the example which He had set before them in excluding unbelievers, in order to enable them to meet the crisis which the presence of the Nicolaitans required them to face.

Nor is it so very difficult, either, to fathom the significance of the "white stone" with the "new name". Surely the words mean what the members of the Pergamene Church would naturally take out of them at the time. Black stones were used in voting to condemn criminals; white stones were used in voting for acquittal. The world would condemn the Church of Pergamos for disciplining the Nicolaitans. It is a way the world has. "Never mind", says Christ, "when my vote is cast, you will be acquitted". Furthermore, the day of acquittal would naturally be a day of bliss. Accordingly, the white stone in those days was commonly thought of and spoken of as an emblem of felicity. But what greater joy could a Christian have than to be acquitted for his conduct at the hands of Christ? It is objected that this takes no account of the "new name". There was another custom of those times, however, with which no one in Pergamos could have been unfamiliar—the custom, namely, of issuing what was known as the *tessera hospitalis*, a ticket of friendship, by which the holder could claim, "at any distance of time, a frank and hearty welcome", wherever the name of the donor was held in high esteem. Suppose, then, as was not unlikely, that on great festal occasions the Emperor may have been the donor, and that the token of friendship may have borne his name, and may have been issued as an invitation to a feast in the temple of Augustus. Can we not

imagine the bliss of the recipient of such a favor? And yet such bliss, as Christ's words imply, is as nothing when compared with the bliss of conscience. And bliss of conscience is something that can be appreciated by no one except the man who has it. Thus the figurative language, when viewed in the light of the ordinary customs of the day, and of the ways of thinking and modes of expression that were current at the time, is self-illuminative. Understood in this way the picture becomes homogenous and coincides with experience. The Church of Pergamos had this to its credit, that it had not lost sight of the "Name"; it was still working solely for the honor of its Lord; but it was hesitating at a point where the honor of Christ required it to move forward. It needed to feed anew and more abundantly on the unseen and invisible Bread of heaven, to drink more deeply from the rivers of its loving Saviour's sympathy, to ally itself more intimately with Him by doing in Pergamos what He had done in Galilee, when by the simple presentation of the truth He excluded the extraneous from the circle of His followers. It had become a necessity, in order to its continued life, that it should refresh and strengthen itself by eating of "the hidden manna".

Then too, to make things complete, it needed the "white stone" and the "new name", a deep indubitable assurance, in other words, of present divine approval and ultimate vindication, rounded out by the consciousness of that incommunicable blessedness which arises in the soul on the occasion of its having done what it knows to be right. The conscious possession of that inner *tessera hospitalis*, with its invitation to the Royal Marriage Supper yonder in the

world of light, whose temple in all its magnificence recedes into oblivion because of the presence of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb—what further could the heart of man wish for or implore!

CHAPTER IX

PREFATORY TO LECTURE V

THYATIRA was located on what had at one time been the border-land between two vast and hostile kingdoms. It was a garrison city between Mysia on the north and Lydia on the south. Ramsay: "It is one of those cities whose situation exposes them to destruction by every conqueror, and yet compels their restoration after every siege and sack. It lies right in the track of invasion: it blocks the way and must be captured by an invader; it guards the passage to a rich district, and hence it must be defended to the last, and so provoke the barbarity of the assailant. . . . Yet the successful assailant must in his turn refortify the city, if he wants to hold the country. He must make it the guardian of his gate; he must make it a garrison city". Thyatira, therefore, illustrates the necessity of guarding the border-land, since the border-land is the key to the kingdom. In point of vital importance Thyatira was on a par with a Pergamos or a Sardis, for the power that held the key could open the gates and make inroads at its pleasure. Liberty and truth are just as sacred at the outskirts of a realm as they are in the citadel. To prove recreant to truth even at its finger-tips is fatal.

Under the Empire, of course, Mysia and Lydia were a unit, and Thyatira had become a peaceful city devoted to trade. Its inhabitants, however, as its coins apprize us, had by no means forgotten its historical significance. It vividly retained this memory, though it was now but an

industrial centre. Charles: "Thyatira was notable for its extensive trading and the number of its guilds of craftsmen, and it is with the question, whether Christians were justified or not in sharing in the common meals of a sacrificial character, that this Letter to the Church in Thyatira is mainly concerned". Swete: "To these guilds many of the Thyatirene Christians would have belonged, and their connection with them would raise questions of much difficulty". Professor Reid (quoted by Swete): "The difficulty which Christians felt in membership of the guilds was by no means confined to the question of the feasts. There was probably no guild which was not devoted to some form of heathen worship. Membership was therefore *ipso facto* bowing down in the house of Rimmon". Ramsay displays a coin which represents the Emperor and the Thyatiran god clasping their hands in support of the Pythian games. "The union of the Emperor and the god in supporting these games", he says, "is the symbolic fashion of intimating, in a way adapted for the surface of a coin, that the Emperor and the god were united in the honor of the festival, that is to say, the festival was no longer celebrated in honor of the god alone, but included both Emperor and god". To join a labor union, therefore, involved the necessity, however remote, of acknowledging the Emperor as God. In other words, membership in these guilds was, as it were, a fine point on the "border-land" between right and wrong.

Worthy of note also, and interesting, are the terms by which they used to designate these guilds. They spoke of them as ἐργασίαι—almost as we would say now, that **labor**

demands this or that; also as συνεργασίαι—the practical equivalent of our **labor unions**; then as συμβιώσεις—emphasizing their common life and companionship, as we do when we speak of them as **associations**; and once more as συστήματα—licensed corporate bodies, with laws and officers, and well-defined responsibilities and obligations, as we think of them when we call them **organizations.**

18. Ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, κτλ. (**the Son of God**)—this whole descriptive epithet, viewed in the light of the letter it introduces, seems to hold in solution, as it were, the complete conception of the Second Psalm: the Roman Empire 'raging' and meditating "a vain thing" "against Jehovah and against His anointed"; the Lord sitting unmolestedly "in the heavens" and 'laughing' at the Imperial programme; the Father investing the "Son" with authority over the nations; the Son treading underfoot with glowing feet all the enemies of truth and rectitude in the furnace of His wrath. Χαλκολιβάνῳ (**glowing copper**)—the heat that would melt silver and many other metals would only make copper glow. Our Lord's capacity to endure seems to be the thought.

19. Here reappears, as also in the remaining letters, the word ἔργα (**works**). In Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamos the church's work is envisaged as a vast spiritual contract undertaken in honor of the Great Contractor and for the purpose of glorifying His blessed Name. Thus from the divine angle. From the angle of this present world, however, the situation in particular communities demands what we might perhaps venture to call a sort of *subcontract,* a contract in keeping with the main contract,

and with the same end in view, but in some distinct and important respects unique and local. "I know thy works", then, is but to say, "I know the specific problem you have in hand at Thyatira".

Thyatira was one of the very best of the Seven Churches. Our Lord says, I know τὴν ἀγάπην (**the love**) you have—that love, namely, which Ephesus had to begin with, but fell away from, and which kept the Ephesians working, while they had it, solely for the glory of Christ; τὴν πίστιν (**the faith**) you have—that faith, namely, which had steadied the Pergamene Church and held it loyal through the tragedies of at least one martyrdom; τὴν διακονίαν (the **knack** you show **in relieving distress**)—called forth, no doubt, oftentimes at least, when their brethren would forfeit their "benefits" on leaving the guilds (the word thus emerging from a background consistent with the characteristic conditions of the locality); τὴν ὑπομονήν (**the patient endurance**) you have—that type of endurance, namely, which enabled them unwaveringly to face the charge, both from without and from some within, of being supersensitive, adept at splitting hairs. In all these excellent qualities of character and conduct the Thyatirans were growing better every day. As a "star" in Christ's "right hand" Thyatira was actually outshining the others, and but for one thing would have been ideal. Christ Himself had no "burden" (v. 24) to lay on Thyatira *except* to get rid of the Jezebelites.

20. Since ἔχω (**I have**) has no object expressed, the clause should be rendered simply—"I have it against thee", ὅτι, κτλ., (**that etc.**). A good deal depends in our interpreta-

tion of this letter on how much or how little we take from that word ἀφεῖς (**"thou sufferest"**). At Pergamos they *had*—the word is ἔχεις (**you have**)—those who **held tenaciously** (κρατοῦντας) to the doctrine of Balaam. The inference is that the malcontents at Pergamos stood out doggedly against every appeal that could be made in behalf of purity. But this implies that the appeal had been made, that something looking toward the elimination of Nicolaitanism had been done. As for the Jezebelites at Thyatira, however, they simply *let them alone*. This means (cf. Moulton and Milligan, *Voc. Gr. T.*) not that they merely disregarded the matter and treated it as an evil that would eventually sink of its own weight, but on the other hand, that *after due deliberation* they *allowed* the Jezebelites to proceed with a free hand without molestation. At all events, it is clear that their guilt, minimize it as much as we may, was of a fatal sort in the sight of Him whose eyes are "like a flame of fire". There is no sin which the church of Christ can afford to *let alone*. It is noteworthy that this same word is used in the letter to Ephesus (v. 4). To *fall short* of 'toiling' solely for the sake of Christ's great Name, and to *fall short* with regard to the duty of keeping the church pure in its membership, are essentially but two aspects of the same thing. Alford retains σοῦ (**thy**) after γυναῖκα (**woman**), which would require the rendering—"thy wife Jezebel". In that case the charge against Thyatira is terrific. It was as much as to say that this woman was a modern Jezebel, and that "the Church of Thyatira in tolerating her presence in the Church was no better than a modern Ahab" (Charles). But σοῦ can hardly be retained.

It is rejected now by an almost unanimous consent. When σοῦ is omitted, the weight of the charge lies on Jezebel rather than on the Church. Then we have—"that woman Jezebel", or "that Jezebel woman", or best of all Moffatt's rendering, that "Jezebel of a woman". Jezebel induced Ahab to acknowledge Baal instead of Jehovah; at bottom, it was the same question that was at stake in Thyatira. What this Jezebel taught was the advisability of coalition with Caesar—such a coalition, that is to say, (although, as the second verb intimates, she would try to conceal this phase of the affair), as would require a corresponding alienation from God. But from the foundation of the world to the present minute alienation from God, no matter how skilfully camouflaged, terminates eventually, with a sort of grim inevitability, in literal licentiousness. The statement of v. 20 sweeps within its compass the whole process, from the first word taught to the last outcome latent in the teaching.

21. The "time" granted Jezebel for repentance, as the context gives us the right to assert, was long enough to allow her teaching to disclose its vicious nature and ingredients. *In the end at least* it was not that she was pursuing her course ignorantly. Even after she has seen the reprehensible results she *makes up her mind*, continuously, day by day,—θέλει (**she decides**) is present—not to alter her course. She is peacefully deliberate. The Thyatirans had taken **the contract,** τὰ ἔργα (v.19), to let nothing interfere with the supremacy of Christ; Jezebel had taken a **counter-contract,** τῶν ἔργων (v. 22), to provide for ascribing Christ's supremacy to Caesar. She was proud

of her contract and meant to see it through. The time, therefore, which was given Jezebel ἵνα μετανοήσῃ (**to the end that she should repent**), was basely abused, for the reason that, during that time, she had been furnished with incontrovertible evidence that her programme was infamously iniquitous. This Jezebel of a woman, then, if she got all that was promised her, got no more than she deserved. She planned to undermine the cause of Christ, and like her historical prototype she had brains enough and was unscrupulous enough to make her plans work.

22. The significant word in this verse is the last one. It lays the guilt of the whole proceeding specifically to the charge of Jezebel. It was αὐτῆς (**her**) scheme, her proposal, her contract—not the Church's. Jezebel and her set moved in a circle of their own. Their circle was a sort of localized cancer, but a cancer, no matter where it is located, is bad enough. "Cast", as a translation of βάλλω, is too suggestive of violence. There is a certain degree of coercion in the word, for no one goes down to a bed of sickness of his own accord, but there is no thought of rudeness or roughness in it. The statement amounts to this—Open your eyes and take account of present outstanding facts; even now I am bringing Jezebel down on a bed of sickness, and those who share her views and the unspeakable contaminations which her views engender am I bringing into great tribulation; and what I am *beginning* to do now I *will bring to completion*, unless—in ἐάν the door of hope still stands open—*unless* within a very short time the whole coterie shall change their mind on the matter, and abandon Jezebel's programme.

23. **"With"**, as a translation of ἐν, is distressingly inadequate. To "kill with death"—how could words say less! The meaning is—I will kill her children **within the circle of** death's own territory, "in this plat, saith the Lord" (II Kings 9:26). To die within the domains where death holds sway is an entirely different thing from dying within the domains where death has been "swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:54). The man that dies on death's domains dies "the second death" (v. 11). Jezebel's "children" unrepentant, would be lost! That anyone familiar with the history of Jezebel and Naboth and Ahab and Ahab's sons and Jehu could write the first sentence of this verse without thinking of the ghastly baskets of dead men's heads in the gates of Jezreel would be next to impossible. (II Kings 10:7, 8.)

That each letter was designed for the enlightenment of the church universal is one implication that should not be lost sight of in γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι (**all the churches shall know**). Also, what they shall know is significant, namely, that those "eyes" that are "like a flame of fire" will always scrutinize the soul, Jezebel's and everybody else's, in such a way as to perceive what **each** (ἕκαστος) deserves. (Cf. Rom. 2:1–11.)

24. That τοῖς λοιποῖς (**the rest**) does not need to signify a minority is indisputable; cf. Matt. 25:11, Mk. 16:12, 13, Lk. 18:9, 11, Acts 2:37, Rev. 9:18, 20. The expression—"as many as hold not this doctrine"—is a strong negative. It means, as many as would **"not have"** (οὐκ ἔχουσιν) anything whatever to do with the doctrine—the doctrine, namely, that it was not a sin in the sight of God to accord

the Emperor the honor that was due to Christ alone. Grammatically the meaning of the next clause is left indeterminate. One has to draw on one's conception of the situation as a whole. The Gnostics, as their name implies, were the men of that day who *knew it all.* "If, in good faith, you ask them a question", says Tertullian, "they answer, with stern look and contracted brow, that 'it is deep'." And Irenaeus speaks of them as men "who say that they have come to the depths of the depth". In point of mentality they felt they could out-satan Satan. He had no secrets which they were not acquainted with and able to nullify. They were such as **claimed** (λέγουσιν) to have come to a **knowledge, once for all,** (ἔγνωσαν), **of** Satan's profundities, and to have come to this knowledge, moreover, by way of experience. Trench's interpretation, therefore, seems to me to be the best. "I should be disposed", he says, "to think with Hengstenberg, that it was they themselves who talked of '*depths of Satan*',—the position of ὡς λέγουσι seems to imply as much,—that in that fearful sophistry wherein they were adepts, and whereby they sought to make a religion of every corrupt inclination of the natural mind, they talked much of '*depths of Satan*', which it was expedient for them to fathom. They taught as we know, that it was a small thing for a man to despise pleasure and to show himself superior to it, while at the same time he fled from it. The true, the glorious victory was, to remain superior to it even while tasting it to the full; to give the body to all the lusts of the flesh, and yet with all this to maintain the spirit in a region of its own, uninjured by them; and thus, as it were, to fight against pleasure with

the arms of pleasure itself; to mock and defy Satan even in his own kingdom and domain". The persons who "*say*" these things, therefore, are the gnosticizers themselves. The meaning comes out clearly if we render thus—"Such as declined to know, once for all and peremptorily, the deep things of Satan, as *they*, the gnosticizers, claimed to". The last clause of the verse, though it has given occasion for much conjecture, really seems to carry its meaning right on the surface. The Thyatiran Church, as a body, was ideal in its possession and cultivation of the Christian graces. It was doing better every day. It came short in but one respect. It harbored Jezebel and her following. It would have to get rid of this incubus. It would be no easy task. The moment the Church of Thyatira would begin to exercise discipline it would bring down the execrations of the entire city on its head, and eventually of the Commune, the Proconsul, the Senate and the Emperor. In the light of this one fact the οὐ ... ἄλλο βάρος (**no other burden**) becomes self-explanatory. Cf. Stuart.

25. Not ἀλλά or δέ, but πλήν, which, in a setting such as the one in question, is about the equivalent of our—"*Only, of course*". The aorist in κρατήσατε (**hold fast**) stamps the exhortation with an air of finality. Once done properly, it would never need to be repeated. The ἄν with ἥξω supplies the necessary indefiniteness which the statement demands, since, in case they should be obliged to die for their loyalty, Christ would come to each respectively at the moment of his decease, as He came to Stephen (Acts 7:55) to welcome him home. The thought is—*Until I shall come, let the time be when it may.* No better comment

than Browning's lines, in "The Martyr's Epitaph", could be imagined—

> "Sickly I was, and poor and mean,—
> A slave; no misery could screen
> The holders of the pearl of price
> From Caesar's envy; therefore twice
> I fought with beasts, and thrice I saw
> My children suffer by his law.
> At length my own release I earned;
> I was some time in being burned,
> But at the last a hand came through
> The flame above my head, and drew
> My soul to Christ, whom now I see".

26, 27. The key word in these verses is τηρῶν (**stands as guard**). It suggests that ἄχρι τέλους (**unto the end**) should be given not a temporal but a spatial significance. In other words, the language is in keeping with the thought of the *garrison city*. Rendered consistently with the requirements in the background this is what we would have—To him who day by day keeps overcoming the enemies of his soul and serves my **interests** (τὰ ἔργα μου) by standing guard *on the very outskirts* of my realm, *to him* will I give authority over the nations. Everything here is to be conceived of spiritually, as a matter of course. Yet we must not think of truth as a mere 'innocent abroad'. Ultimately truth shatters not only error, but error's exponents, to atoms. At bottom, it was outraged truth that laid low in death something like forty millions in the late World War. Every time a Christian bears faithful witness

to the truth he is responsible just in so far for the ensuing battle, of whatever kind it may be, in which truth's enemies shall be humbled in the dust. One thing more should be noted here; it lies in the perfect tense of εἴληφα (**I have received**). *In the past* Pergamos, when it was in the ascendancy, gave its power and authority over to Thyatira to "guard" the border. *In the past*, also, Sardis, when *it* was in the ascendancy, commissioned Thyatira to use the Lydian armies to "guard" its interests on the boundary line. All this, however, had come to an end. So much for the suggestiveness of the historical setting. With Christ it is different. In His case He *has received*, and, as the perfect tense so aptly intimates, *still holds* the right to place His "good soldiers" in the garrison cities of His dominions; the Father commissions Him, He commissions them, and His right to do so will never end.

28. Much has been said, to no effect, on this verse. Many hold that the "morning star" is Christ Himself. Alford grants that there is a "mystical sense" in which "Christ Himself is the sum and inclusion of all Christ's gifts", but adds that "here the morning star clearly is not Christ Himself, the very terms of the sentence separating the two". If such a view is to be held, Plumptre's statement of it is among the best, (see Note in *Meyer*). But why not allow the setting to furnish the clue? The structure of the letter supplies us with a picture of a lone soldier, performing his duty as a sentinel, away out on the uttermost bounds of the kingdom, through the long night of darkness and danger and discouragement, wearily waiting for the break of day. It is of such a one that Jesus says,

"I will give him the morning star". A faithful servant of Jesus Christ will not have to die in the dark. On the horizon of night's black arch the star of hope will rise and take its place as the harbinger of day. In the last extreme something within the believer's soul breaks forth and says—

> "But, look, the morn, in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yond' high eastern hill".

Ultimately, at all events, the light appears. What is it? Christ? If so, it is Christ thought of as "a light to lighten the nations" (Lk. 2:32).

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

To the angel of the Church of Thyatira, or, as one would say, to the Church of Thyatira as the Church of Thyatira ought to be, write as follows:

These things says the Son of God, He who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like brass glowing in a furnace. I know your contract, and the love and faith and generosity and patient endurance you are putting into it, and I know that you have a larger contract on your hands today than you had at the first, and that you are handling it better the longer you work at it. But I have it against you that you are leaving that Jezebel of a woman unmolested—the one, you know, who, since she calls herself a prophetess, both teaches and is successful in seducing my servants to pollute themselves and to eat things offered to idols. For my part, I gave her time, to the end that she should repent; and she, on her part, instead of repenting, keeps resolving day by day, in scorn of added light, not to

repent of her lewdness. Look around you, and take account of things that are occurring right before your eyes—I am even now bringing her down on a bed of sickness, and her paramours I am bringing into great distress; and what I have begun I will complete, unless, of course, they change their minds, and cease to work on her contract. And as for her children—those, namely, who attach themselves irrecoverably to her programme—I will bring them down to death on death's own domains, so that when they die they shall die the "second death". Thus the entire church of the living God shall know that I am He that examines motives and intentions and reads the heart, and that I am He who, when the time comes, will deal with each man in particular according to the way in which he has performed his part of the contract drawn up by myself for the church as a whole, or, on the other hand, according to the way in which he has labored on a counter-contract with a view to thwarting my designs. As for the rest of you in Thyatira, however,—as many of you, that is to say, as have nothing whatever in common with Jezebel's theories; such of you as declined, point-blank, to know the deep things of Satan, as they claimed to know them—upon you I lay no other burden than the one under which you are groaning at the present time, the burden, namely, of getting rid of the Jezebelites. Only, of course, what you have already, as I mentioned at the outset, make up your mind once for all to hold tenaciously until I come to relieve you, as every sentry is in time relieved, whensoever that may be. He who conquers daily and stands guard heroically over my interests on the outskirts of my dominions—to

him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them (not they him) with an iron sceptre, even as defective earthenware is shivered to pieces by the potter; this authority and power, moreover, I will pass along to my sentries even as I myself have received it from my Father; and to that faithful sentinel of mine, whosoever he may be, who, owing to the dense darkness of the night, thinks all is lost—to him will I give the encouragement he needs, for I will show him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the whole church.

Chapter Two, verses 18—29.

CHAPTER X

THE LETTER TO THYATIRA

A Message Concerning the Duty of Dissenting from Evil

THYATIRA is situated about midway between Pergamos and Sardis in a shallow valley through which there flows a little stream that joins the Lycus and the Hermus on its pathway to the sea. The valley of the Caicus river runs east and west past Pergamos, while the valley of the Hermus runs east and west past Sardis. These two parallel valleys, therefore, rich in every kind of traffic, were connected by the lesser, though almost equally important, valley, in which sat Thyatira. Thyatira accordingly could never afford to act in the spirit of independence. In time of war her fate was in the hands of the winning power. In times of peace it was prudent to court commercial favors in all directions.

In earlier days the city was on the border line between two rival monarchies, between the Pergamenians on the north, and the Seleucids, or Syrian kings, on the south. "It came into existence", says Sir William Ramsay, "to be a garrison-city; and its importance to the two rival dynasties who alternately ruled it lay in its military strength. But no city", he goes on to say, "has been given by nature less of the look or strength of a fortress than Thyatira. It lies in an open, smiling vale, bordered by gently sloping hills, of moderate elevation, but sufficient

to overshadow the vale. It possesses no proper acropolis, and the whole impression which the situation gives is of weakness, subjection and dependence. The most careless and casual observer could never take Thyatira for a ruling city, or the capital of an Empire". Still, while it was thus naturally weak, it was always made strong by the power that was in the ascendancy at the time. If the Seleucids held it, they filled it with fierce and warlike soldiers who kept themselves ready to march against the Pergamenians and dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. If the Pergamenians held it, they in turn filled it with their battalions, that they might hold their southern enemies at bay, and break them, if need be, with a rod of iron.

This military aspect of the city is strikingly illustrated on its coins. Of these Ramsay displays a number that are intensely interesting. On one, Tyrimnos, who represents both the spirit and the function of the city, is riding horseback, with a battle-ax across his shoulder; on another, the genius of the city, in a long flowing robe, and wearing a crown, is holding forth on her right hand the image of Tyrimnos, with his battle-ax over his shoulder, and his right hand extended in the act of offering a laurel branch to the Emperor Caracalla, who, in turn, is riding horseback and raising his right hand in token of his recognition of the city's god; on another, the Emperor, dressed as a general, and Tyrimnos, still with his battle-ax in his hand, are represented as facing each other and clasping their right hands, while between them at their feet stands an altar blazing with the sacrifice, and above their clasping hands is poised an urn over which the word "PYTHIA" is in-

scribed; on the fourth, Hephaestus, the god of the smithy, is seated in front of an anvil finishing a helmet, for which Pallas Athena is waiting with extended hand. These coins, as is evident, are replete with historical significance. For one thing, they exhibit the function of the city in times of war, namely, to wield the battle-ax in defense of the sovereign, whoever he might be, to whom it owed its allegiance; again, they symbolize the good will that existed between the city and the Empire, as is apparent from the attitude of the god, approved by the city, in extending the laurel branch to the Emperor, and of the Emperor, in return, in raising his right hand in adoration of the god; still further, they indicate the mutual purpose and determination of the city and the state to worship at the same altar, and to co-operate in the support of the Pythian games where the Emperor would be acknowledged as divine; and lastly, the representation of Hephaestus, seated at his anvil, in the act of perfecting a bronze helmet for Athena, is indicative of the trades that flourished in the city in times of peace, and helps us to realize how readily the inhabitants of Thyatira would comprehend that reference in the letter which likens the feet of the Son of man to glowing or burnished brass.

Of course, under the Roman régime Thyatira had no need to be garrisoned, for all the country, both north and south, belonged to the Empire. In the reign of Domitian the city had long been enjoying an era of peace. It had become a manufacturing city and a city of commerce. It had all kinds of trade guilds and labor unions. These appear to have been corporate entities, licensed or chartered

by the Commune, just as similar organizations today are subjected to governmental control. Ultimately therefore they were under the management of the sovereign, for as they were answerable to the Commune, so the Commune was answerable for them to the Proconsul, and through him to the Senate and the Emperor. It is wonderful how many of these unions there were. Every industry had its guild. Among others, the bakers, the dyers, the tanners, the clothiers, the potters, the weavers, the cobblers, the braziers, might be specially mentioned. Moreover, to belong to a guild was almost an essential prerequisite to success in business. Any tradesman or artisan who held himself aloof from the organization, to membership in which his occupation naturally entitled him, was boycotted financially and ostracized socially. Nor were the guilds by any means destitute of commendable features. They had their talking points. Association itself was a good thing. They enabled the workmen to present a united front in the interests of their respective crafts. They made provision for mutual aid. They were admittedly helpful from many points of view. The trouble was that they were thoroughly paganistic. Their first concern was to choose a patron god. In fact, as some one has said, "they affirmed their existence by a common worship". They sealed the bonds of fellowship in sacrificial meals, and though Thyatira had no temple dedicated to any of the Emperors, the worshippers in its numerous societies, as we may judge from its coins, never allowed Augustus to be robbed of his Imperial share in their devotions. To become a member of a guild was to become incorporated

into a system which was essentially antagonistic to Christ and Christianity. And its practices were as bad as its principles. The guilds then, like the unions of today, were tyrannical in spirit; they had no use for the "open shop"; the man who proposed to buy and sell had to be able to satisfy the public that he was himself of the "union brand". Otherwise he and his family could starve, and he could be charged with disloyalty to the "Divine Augustus". Things in those days were woven into a social fabric. Nothing was overlooked or left out of account. Every fiber in the web was inwrought with Emperor-worship. And Thyatira was perhaps the most conspicuous city that could have been chosen to exemplify this disintegrating and corruptive state of affairs—disintegrating and corruptive, I say, for the indecencies and debaucheries indulged in at their festivals and banquets were but the legitimate outcome of the Imperial system of idolatry.

With these facts before us it is impossible not to appreciate the fitness and the force of the description under which our Lord presents Himself to the Church of Thyatira. He had eyes that could scrutinize the Imperial cult and follow it out to its minutest ramifications and ultimate fruitage, and could search out and appraise the character and motives of such as were determined to keep their names on the church's roll without renouncing the world. Moreover, since His feet had once carried Him unharmed through the glowing crucible of infinite agony in the garden and on the cross, He was ready now to walk with His loyal friends through the fires of persecution, and at the same time tread their antagonists underfoot in the furnace of His wrath.

He could see, and He could help. He was qualified to meet the situation. The faithful in Thyatira were to have no misgivings; they were under the supervision of "the Son of God", who had been "begotten", in point of fact, on the "day" that He triumphed over death and received from the Father the commission to break the nations "with a rod of iron" and "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel". In short, in the letter to Thyatira we have placed before us a concrete illustration of the Second Psalm.

It is quite possible to underestimate what Professor James would call the "cash value" of the Church of Thyatira. The scathing things that are said about Jezebel and her kind may have been applicable to a very limited number of the congregation. It was a suicidal mistake, as the letter shows, that her teachings should have been tolerated for a moment. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump". But the coterie of Jezebelites, after all, may not have been large. The opening words of commendation indicate that the Church, as a Church, was faithful. It was characterized by the love that discriminates between right and wrong, and aligns itself with the truth. Its faith was centred in Christ, the sole Saviour of men. Its love and its faith made themselves manifest in helpful ministrations. It had the grace of patient endurance, which implies that the citizens of Thyatira made it hard for the Church to maintain its integrity. It was advancing, doing better every day, becoming more and more adept in withstanding the contradiction of sinners against itself. Thus the language of the letter, when duly considered, makes it highly probable that the majority in the Thyatiran Church were

strong, loyal, consistent, energetic Christians. There is no reason why "the rest", or remainder, spoken of later on, should be regarded as designating a minority; the word is noncommittal. Paul comforts the Thessalonians with the assurance that they have no need to sorrow "even as the rest, who have no hope". But "the rest, who have no hope", are the vast majority. There is nothing therefore in the letter to forbid us to think, but much, on the contrary, to justify us in thinking, that the Church of Thyatira was a vigorous and flourishing band of good heroic Christians, all the more noble because the form of temptation to which they were exposed, and which for the most part they succeeded in resisting, was so superlatively subtle and deceptive in its nature, and could be upheld and recommended by such plausible arguments.

The peculiar task of the Church of Thyatira, therefore, was to make a stand against the labor unions and social clubs of the time, and thus to come into conflict with one of the well known and universally recognized features of civic life, and, as the outside world would say, of civic duty, in connection with everyday affairs. And this, we may infer, it did, and did unflinchingly. As against the external enemy it was as yet fighting a good fight. The trouble, as usual, was from within. There was one woman in the congregation, who, if left unhindered, would be enough to wreck the whole cause of Christ in Thyatira. As Moffatt so happily renders it, she was "a Jezebel of a woman". And when that was said, the utmost that could be said was said.

Jezebel! What a dark page in the history of Israel that

name recalls! Let us scan the page once more, though hastily.

Under David and Solomon the truth that God the Father is the sole source and fountain of civil authority among men, that His Son, whom He appointed King, is to be acknowledged as Sovereign, and reverently worshipped, by all nations, and that the Inspired Word is the only manual of guidance from which the governments of the earth may receive moral enlightenment, was established in fact, declared in language, embedded in precepts and statutes and laws, acknowledged in prayers, sung in psalms, talked about in homes, and pondered in private, until it had worked its way into the very corpuscles of the blood, and had become part and parcel of Israel's life. To this great institutional principle the kingdom of Judah, after the division of the nation under Rehoboam, had for many years remained loyal, at least prevailingly. But the kingdom of Israel, under the reign of Jeroboam, renounced God with deliberate forethought and usurped the authority which belonged to His Son. Jeroboam abandoned the divine ideals and methods and adopted his own—his own places of worship, his own seasons of worship, his own modes of worship. He left the Lord of heaven and earth out of account, became a law to himself, and taught Israel to supplant the wisdom of God with human substitutes. But this process, thus started by Jeroboam, of breaking away from Jehovah, reached its logical climax in Ahab, for we are told that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him". And then, as though it were a "light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the

Son of Nebat", he went further, indeed as far as he could, for he "took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him". In other words, Ahab was as bad as Ethbaal the king of the Zidonians—as bad, that is to say, as the king who stood hand in glove, as his very name asserts, "with Baal". Ethbaal means 'in coalition with Baal'. In the Zidonian king Baal had a loyal and enthusiastic supporter. And Jezebel in this respect was not behind her father. In fact, to all appearances she had a double portion of his spirit. And if ever a woman had a man completely under her thumb, Jezebel had Ahab under hers. "Art thou king?" she asked him on one occasion—to which his answer should have been, "After you, my dear". She had him build a "house" for Baal in Samaria; she had him erect an "altar" in it; she had him "make the Asherah", the wooden image of the goddess Ashtoreth, for it; she took him to church with her and had him "worship" Baal and Ashtoreth; and then, to make the job complete, she had him "serve" Baal, which is but to say, she had him order all the affairs of state, down to the minutest, according to a Baalitical programme. If we may discard the pleonasm for the moment, she meant that everyone in her day should say "Lord Baal", as it were, even as Domitian meant that everyone in his day should say "Lord Caesar". Through Jezebel Ahab took Baal to be his god—the divinity, in fact, from whom he received his right to reign. The doctrine or teaching of Jezebel was that Jehovah, if indeed she would concede His existence at all, had nothing to do with governmental affairs. At her insistence, accordingly, Ahab, who ought

to have been reigning in the name of the living God and of the Messiah, and whose political policies and programme of action should have been moulded by revelations from on high, developed into nothing but the wretchedest traitor under heaven toward all that was good and noble, and consistent with truth and purity.

Unfortunately they had just such "a Jezebel of a woman" in the Church of Thyatira. She posed as a prophetess, protested that she was sent of God to proclaim a message, in order that she might the more successfully "write good angel on the devil's horn", and deceive, if possible, the very elect. The specific things she undertook to teach, and the various ways in which she tried to allure, are not enumerated, but inasmuch as the sensualities mentioned are precisely those that were native to the banquets of the trade guilds and social clubs of the city, it is not hard to surmise what the leading characteristics of her ebulliency must have been. The test question of the hour was membership in the trade guilds. Union with these institutions necessarily involved the worship of pagan deities, whose multifarious attributes, in Asia Minor at that time, were invariably thought of as sublimated and coming to a focus in the person of the Emperor. On the theoretical side, therefore, to belong to a trade guild was a barefaced violation of the First Commandment, whereas on the practical side, as everybody knew, it was like taking apartments in a hothouse of licentiousness. The faithful in Thyatira declined to unite with these associations. Their watchword was, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate". Jezebel and her following, on the contrary, used

the Gnostic argument. Their solution was, "Let us plunge into 'the deep things of Satan'—judiciously of course—and show the world that our Christianity is able to neutralize them". They argued that they ought to take part in the existing life and usages of the community, and thus by participation elevate society to a higher plane. As for themselves they were immune. They had fathomed "the deep things of Satan", could pass through them with a consciousness of superiority and indifference, and come off in the end undefiled by the contact. They held that they could have fellowship with Christ and still "walk in darkness", that spiritual strength could be developed in no other way than by personally sounding the depths of evil, and that Christians, to be worthy of the name, ought to be able to frustrate Satan on his own domains. Certain things, they admitted,—such, for example, as ascribing divinity to the Emperor and worshipping him as God,—were sins, and they would protest that it was their purpose to have these sins eliminated, but they had the audacity to maintain that the best way to do it was by becoming guilty of the sins. It was a poor Christian that could not protect himself, in dishonoring Christ, by a prudent resort to mental reservation. Whether or not Jezebel was a full-fledged Gnostic we do not know, but that the language of the letter supports the assumption that her tenuous imaginary refinements in the field of moral conduct were so seductive and disintegrating as to require the interference and admonitions of Him who "searcheth the reins and the heart" is not open to question. Gnostic distinctions were diabolically subtle; they were indeed "the deep things of

Satan"; and by the Gnostics' own kind of distinctions, if not by their identical distinctions, Jezebel had succeeded in leading some of the converts of Thyatira to disown Jesus Christ as their Lord, and in persuading them that it was possible to be lewd without being contaminated.

But that a man shall be caught in the cords of his own sin is as inescapable as the law of gravitation. The story of Jezebel is still discernible in the sentence pronounced. Naboth owned a vineyard "which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab". That Ahab might have it Jezebel ordained that Naboth should die. When the executioners return and report—"Naboth is stoned, and is dead", Jezebel orders Ahab to take possession of the vineyard. So far the plan is successful; it works; Fortune wears a smile. Then Elijah, who comes to speak for God, arrives upon the scene, and through him both Jezebel and Ahab receive the verdict of the Judge of all the earth. Their punishment is to be one in kind with their sin. It is to take place on practically the same spot of ground. "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine". "I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord". "And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel". Moreover, when we read, "I will kill her children with death", and then recall how Jehu's agents "took the kings' sons, and slew them, even seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them unto him to Jezreel", the two pictures not only coalesce and blend in one, but the situation becomes dramatic. The heads of Ahab's sons, jostled into baskets, and piled in heaps in the

very gates of Jezreel, that they might gaze from their hollow sockets on Naboth's vineyard! It is like the ghost of Banquo taking its seat in the chair of Macbeth. "Be sure your sin will find you out".

With this piece of history before us the language of the letter comes but little short of being self-explanatory. This Jezebel of a woman had been 'let alone' entirely too long, in so far as the Church's obligation to keep itself pure was concerned. It was a lapse that had a twofold effect. First of all, it brought the Church of Thyatira into ill repute. When these wiseacres developed in the process of time, as they did, into nothing but common libertines, the fact would finally be brought home to the faithful that their Church had been disgraced. They would eventually come to see that by their leniency they had allowed themselves to become a laughingstock in the eyes of the world. Their suffering on that account, we may be sure, would be intense. They would realize, when it would be too late to escape the obloquy, how they had been caught in the coils of their own sin. Their lapse, however, had a second effect, for it allowed Jezebel and her companions ample time for repentance. Jezebel could see how her heterodoxies were working out. She was wicked—not stupid. She resolved not to repent, not to change her mind or her policies, albeit her theories made profligates of all who held them. She would still continue to give Christ's honor to Augustus, let the consequences be what they might. There was nothing left for her but "judgment and fiery indignation". And furthermore, her suffering would be of a kind with her sin. There is no reason why the sickness and

tribulation referred to here should not be regarded as physical ills inflicted for spiritual ends; in order that, in case of repentance, they might prove to be a "savor of life unto life", or failing in that, of "death unto death". As the original Jezebel had been eaten on the very "plat", so to speak, where her crime had been committed, so this twin spirit of hers, together with her paramours, would be brought low after the fashion of their specific transgressions. The description, when we stop to consider it, is dreadful in its import. "I will kill her children with death", says Christ—which is the same as saying, 'in the territory of' death, 'on death's own grounds', "in this plat, saith the Lord". To be killed on death's own demesnes is an entirely different thing from dying as a martyr. In the former instance death has everything its own way—it ushers its victim out into "the blackness of darkness for ever"; in the latter, it defeats itself by its own stroke, for it only releases the martyr and transfers him to his "inheritance" among the saints in light. For believers who were face to face with martyrdom the "first death" was past, and they could "not be hurt of the second death"; for the "children" of Jezebel the "first death" had never been annulled, and consequently at the moment of their departure it was simply confirmed and made perpetual. They had never gotten out of the field of death, and never would. The Son of God cannot be deceived or evaded. He who has "eyes like a flame of fire" and can unerringly search "the reins and hearts " of men, and who has "feet like unto burnished brass" and has warned men that He "will give unto each" according to his works, will find no distinctions

too ethereal for Him to penetrate, and no power great enough to stay His hand from dealing out a just recompense of reward to such as despise His mercy and trifle with the goodness and longsuffering that were meant to pave the way to repentance. Jezebel and her sympathizers, with their "false subtleties" and insidious excuses and apologies for compromising the honor of Christ, were the curse of the Church of Thyatira, and of the church universal, and so, according to their "hardness and impenitent hearts", they were treasuring up for themselves "wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality—eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil". What fools men are to try to hide themselves under subterfuges in dealing with the Son of God!

As for "the rest" in Thyatira—whether they were the minority, or as is more probable, the majority—they were confronted immediately with an unenviable task, and, once that was performed, with an illustrious work to be done for the kingdom of Christ. The task is spoken of as no "other burden". Instantly the question arises—No other than what? The most obvious answer is supplied by the context. These four letters, let us remember, were read all at once in each Church. They all lie within the limits of one chapter. Each was meant for all. Now Ephesus disciplined its offending members and expelled them, and

is commended for doing so. Pergamos, on the other hand, stopped short of exercising discipline, and is censured accordingly. Thyatira, in turn, came even wider of the mark than Pergamos; for what Pergamos submitted to under protest, as the milder word compared with the stronger would imply, Thyatira, to all intents and purposes, condoned. It allowed Jezebel to go on with her programme unmolested; it "let her alone". The first duty, therefore, the most pressing and imperative duty, of the Thyatirans was to get rid of the Jezebelites. The Church of Thyatira could never shine as a "light" in the world, so long as it was lax enough to retain in its membership a bevy of harlots. It would have to address itself to the demands of the hour, and exercise discipline. For the moment that was its task; for the moment no "other burden" was resting upon it; until it should rise to the occasion and eject its corrupters, it could never be reckoned among the efficient forces for the evangelization of the world. In fact, that the church of Jesus Christ must keep itself pure is the incandescent message of every line and syllable addressed to the Seven Churches.

Along with the exercise of discipline, however, they would need to "hold fast" what they had. And the letter tells us at the outset that they had deep, profound, discriminating love; strong faith in the strong Son of God; the spirit and the habit of ministering to the needy; the courage to hold out tenaciously against every form of inducement or attack; and finally, the tendency to grow and increase in love, and faith, and helpfulness, and patient endurance, as the years rolled by. If, therefore, they would

but rid themselves of the Jezebelites, and at the same time remain, as in the past, true to form, they would find themselves equipped and ready to serve their Lord, even as the good soldiers of the garrison-city in days of old had served their sovereign.

Let it be emphasized once more that the head and front of the Christians' offense in Thyatira, as at Pergamos, was their refusal to be inveigled into saying "Lord Caesar" instead of "Lord Jesus". It was this that kept them out of the guilds. In the eyes of the world, as in the eyes of the Jezebelites, it was like splitting hairs. The faithful in Thyatira were fighting the good fight on the borderland, on the very outskirts of the kingdom—were making their stand heroically, that is to say, on matters which seemed to the vast majority of their fellow men to be items of total indifference. The Son of God, accordingly, offered them strong inducements. As it requires a deeper and more intelligent loyalty to stand one's ground when the point is debatable than it does when the issue is admittedly clear, the promised reward, if it was to act as an inspiration, had to be in keeping with the service rendered and the privations endured. And it was. The rendering—"he that keepeth my works unto the end"—hardly furnishes us with a hint of the meaning. What we have here is a picture of a lone soldier, standing guard at one of the uttermost outposts of his Sovereign's realm, calmly resolved, on pain of death, that no one shall injure his Sovereign's interests or infringe on His rights. The members of the Thyatiran Church were not to forget that they were living in what was known in history as the garrison-city, the city which stood

on the boundary line between Mysia and Lydia, and whose duty it was to hold at bay and smash like potsherds the enemies of whatever kingdom it might happen to be in alliance with at the time. As for themselves, they were in alliance with the Son of God, and if they would but show themselves worthy, He would invest them with power and give them authority not only over the Empire in which they were living, but over all the nations of the earth for all time to come. Yet only as His glory came to Him could this honor come to them. His commission from the Father sent Him to the outskirts of a desolate universe to be nailed to a tree, and of the people there was none with Him. He had to fight the battle alone, He had to win it by death; it was the only way to victory, for not until the hand of Death had done its work and the Son of God had shown Himself to be a conqueror could the Father speak of redemption as historically accomplished and say to the victorious Redeemer, "This day have I begotten thee". It was on the cross that Jesus Christ "asked" the Father for the nations. It was through its agonies that He purchased the right to universal dominion. If His friends in Thyatira would only stand the test, if they were only willing to drink of the cup that He drank of and to be baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, He would clothe them with a vaster power and a more universal authority than the mightiest Emperor had ever known or even dreamed of. Their loyalty might require them to march breast-forward through many tempests of Imperial wrath; they might be hailed before the Commune and the Proconsul and condemned to seal their testimony with their blood;

clouds and thick darkness might envelop them in the blackness of midnight as they walked through "the valley of the shadow of death", but the Son of God would be with them, and would illumine their pathway and guide their steps by the golden beams of the "Morning Star". The Christian martyr is a victor. Neither malice nor metal can reach him. He lives too deeply. When "hard-hearted Clifford", whose face "the hungry cannibals would not have touched", and "rough, remorseless" Margaret, with her "tiger's heart, wrapped in a woman's hide", buried their daggers in the quivering flesh of the wounded Duke of York, think you they triumphed? I tell you, Nay. No man can be defeated who can use his dying breath, as did the Duke, to cry—

"Open thy gate of mercy, gracious God!
My soul flies through these wounds to seek out Thee".

A spirit like that can not be conquered. It makes its exit as "seeing Him who is invisible". Its end is ecstasy.

What a vital message this is, which the Spirit has addressed through the Thyatirans to the church of all ages! By this letter, while time continues, every child of God of every clime is encouraged to hold the truth unflinchingly, in the face of the subtlest and fiercest kind of opposition, including martyrdom, that Satan can devise, until the determinate moment, whensoever that may be, when his Lord shall come to grant him his release. As the faithful in Thyatira, by denying deity to the Emperor, made themselves greater than the Emperor whose wrath and power they disregarded, so it would ever be with loyal Christians.

No matter how lowly he may be, loyalty to Jesus Christ makes a man a monarch. It enables him to walk erect with his head amid the stars. "Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's", such a man is kingly;

> "His looks are full of peaceful majesty;
> His head by nature framed to wear a crown,
> His hand to wield a sceptre".

The genuine Christian neither compromises nor complains. He tells the truth, and abides the issue. He more than answers to Shakespeare's portrait of Henry VI., when the royal person of the king was apprehended by the sneaking servile Keepers, and their inbred cruelty and upstart insolence were calmly overborne by latent dignity and strength of character.

Second Keeper. Say, what art thou that talk'st of kings and queens?

King. More than I seem, and less than I was born to:
A man at least, for less I should not be;
And men may talk of kings, and why not I?

Second Keeper. Ay, but thou talk'st as if thou wert a king.

King. Why, so I am in mind; and that's enough.

Second Keeper. But, if thou be a king, where is thy crown?

King. My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not deck'd with diamonds, and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen: my crown is call'd content;
A crown it is, that seldom kings enjoy.

To every loyal soul that scorns to deny His blessed Name, the Son of God passes on the promise made to Himself by the Father in the unbegun eternities: "I will make Him my Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth".

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches".

CHAPTER XI

PREFATORY TO LECTURE VI

THE history of Sardis is more than ordinarily interesting. It gleams through this letter like sunshine through a prism. To get at the material needed here one must read Herodotus Bk. 1. (particularly §§ 30–33 and § 84), and Polybius Bk. VII. (§§ 15–18). The Greek text of the latter portion of § 18, dwelt upon in the lecture, is as follows—νουνεχῶς καὶ πραγματικῶς ἐφεδρεύοντες τοῖς ὅλοις.
A few citations from Ramsay's *Letters* will supply us with an immediate working picture. In Sardis "the whole policy of a warlike kingdom was focussed. To fight against Lydia was to fight against Sardis. The master of Sardis was the master of Lydia. . . . It was the great, the wealthy, the impregnable city, against which none could strive and prevail. . . . The plateau (on which it stood) is fully fifteen hundred feet above the plain. . . . On such a lofty hill, . . . whose sides are, and must from their nature always have been, steep and straight and practically perpendicular, a child could guard against an army; even a small stone dropped on the head of the most skilful mountain-climber would inevitably hurl him down. . . . (When the impossible happened, as it did happen, and as it happens so often, it came about through an) accidental, unobserved, unguarded weak point, which had developed through the disintegration of the rock. . . . In the Roman period it was almost like a city of the past, a relic of the period of barbaric warfare, which lived rather on its

ancient prestige than on its suitability to present conditions. . . . Sardis as a great and ruling city was dead. It had sunk to a second-rate city in a Province. . . . The Church is here addressed apparently with the set purpose of suggesting that the fortunes of ancient Sardis had been its own fortunes, that it had endured those sieges, committed those faults of carelessness and blind confidence, and sunk into the same decay and death as the city" (within pp. 354–380). Yet, though Sardis was "dead", it would doubtless have been the last city in the world to admit it. It is so often so. In A.D. 17 it was wrecked by an earthquake. To rebuild it Tiberius donated 10,000,000 sesterces and remitted its taxes for five years. It rose from its ruins so rapidly that Strabo, who died in A.D. 24, was able—some time within, probably towards the end of, those seven years—to describe it as a **"great city"** (πόλις μεγάλη). "Like Thyatira", says Swete, "it was famous for its woolen manufactures and dyeing industry (cf. Smith, *D.B.* p. 1140), and the ancient system of roads of which it was a meeting-point secured for it the trade of central Asia". Evidently it still had "a name to live".

Further specially suggestive and illuminating comments. Charles: Sardis "reached the height of its prosperity under Croesus (*circ.* 560 B.C.). On its conquest by Cyrus it became the seat of a Persian Satrapy, and its history for the next three centuries is buried in obscruity. Under Roman rule it recovered some of its ancient importance, and became the centre of a *conventus juridicus*; but, notwithstanding, no city in Asia presented a more deplorable contrast of past splendor and present unresting decline.

. . . It contended, though unsuccessfully, with Smyrna for the privilege of raising a temple to Tiberius (Tac. Ann. iv. 55). . . . Its inhabitants had long been notorious for luxury and licentiousness (Herod. i. 55; Aesch. *Pers.* 45)". Beckwith: "It was made one of the seats of the Roman provincial courts, and it vied with other Asian cities for the honor of erecting a temple for the emperor-worship. The Church at Sardis, so far as appears from the epistle, was untroubled in both its external relations, and its internal state. Nothing is said of hostility on the part of the Jewish element in the community, nothing of the tribulation or endurance spoken of in all the other epistles except that to the Laodiceans; and though Sardian Christians had fallen into immorality (v. 4), this is not attributed to the influence of Nicolaitan teachers in the Church. This very freedom from the struggles forced upon the Churches generally, and the hereditary Lydian character famed for its softness and love of luxury (cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 41, Hdt. I. 155) may account for the deep spiritual apathy into which the Sardian Church had sunk. 'The atmosphere of an old pagan city, heavy with the immoral traditions of eight centuries, was unfavorable to the growth of her spiritual life' (Swete lx)". Meyer: "Its members had a dead faith; they faltered in their faith, and lacked the works, and the holy, pure life, which proceed from the living power of the true faith".

Thus the plain facts would seem to be that the citizens of Sardis, on the one hand, had become so thoroughly satisfied with themselves and with their comforts and luxuries that they were disinclined to trouble themselves about

the Church that had lately grown up in their city, and that the members of the Church of Sardis, on the other hand, had become imbued with the same spirit to such an extent as to give the city no cause to be concerned. It was precisely the opposite at Smyrna. There the Christians asserted themselves, and the city asserted itself; both were in earnest. Here the apathy is equal, and there is nothing but apathy. And doubtless Rome, in the contest referred to, had noted the characteristic indifference and complacency of Sardis.

1. Christ is **the One who has** (ὁ ἔχων), the One who **possesses,** the Holy Spirit in all the Spirit's sevenfold fulness, and the One as well who "has" in Himself "the seven stars", the infinitely perfect .light. Hence all human spirits are open to Him, and cannot evade Him. Hence also, since He is the Son of man (1:13), the human spirit can perceive the splendid light of His example and appreciate it. Charles's remark, that this clause is "to be regarded as a redactional addition of our Seer when he edited his visions as a whole", vanishes, on investigation, "into thin air". The clause and the letter are of the same essence; they are bound together indissolubly. Alford sees in the first part of the epithet the summing up of "the whole weight and majesty of the divine character of our Lord", with a view to creating alarm and bringing about repentance. "The designation here has its appropriateness in the whole character of this solemn epistle. The Lord of the church comes, armed with all the powers of Spirit; searching the depths of hypocrisy, judging of the worthlessness of works not done in faith". To Sardis, as to Thyatira, a special **contract** (τὰ ἔργα) had been allotted; its equipment to this

end was perfect; it could have lived gloriously and have become splendidly immortal; it could have **"fulfilled"** (πεπληρωμένα) its contract; but instead it preferred an evanescent reputation wedded to "a death's head with a bone in (its) mouth". What fools men are to choose death rather than life!

2. Γίνου γρηγορῶν (**come to be as one who keeps watching**) has as much strength in it as can be packed into two words; *begin to be what you are not*; it is a command which requires an immediate, unconditional and continuous change of front. Divine injunctions are absolute; God never halts half-way. The imperfect in ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν (**which were ready to die**) is perfectly natural from the writer's point of view. The Overseer *had* made His rounds and *had* found such and such conditions existing; at the time when He *was* making His rounds He found that certain things *were* on the point of dying. These things needed to be **established** (στήρισον) on the instant, as the aorist implies, and so as to leave no occasion for repetitions. The **things that remained** (τὰ λοιπά) were not the persons, the "few names" (v. 4),—these were not on the point of dying—but the customs, manner of life, forms of worship, kinds of enterprise, which were distinctively Christian in their outward semblance, and consequently good and laudable. The article τά, judging from the external evidence, seems to be the slightly better authenticated reading, whereas τὰ ἔργα, intrinsically considered, is certainly not the less probable. Beckwith: "The line of argument here makes more probable a reference to the general character and condition of the church as a whole than to a short-

coming in every particular virtue". "I have found that thy contract has not been fulfilled before my God." The sentence sounds like a death-knell. **Fulness** (πλήρωμα) of measure or capacity **in the sight of God** (ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ) is the only standard of ethics that will avail in the judgment. The perfect tense in εὕρηκα is laden with mercy—**'I have not found,** though I have not as yet given up the search'.

3. There is no reason whatsoever why πῶς should be overburdened. It means **"how"**, and that is all it does mean. The language as it stands in its simplicity is limpid. *The way* in which they were receiving the message at the moment was by direct divine authority at the hands of an apostle. As much as this is a self-evident fact. From this fact the perfect takes its start, as it were, and reaches backward. **"How you have received"** (πῶς εἴληφας) links the past and the present into a unit. What they received, from first to last, came to them with infallible accuracy. There was *no way out* for them by dint of misinformation. To this view the immediate transition to the aorist gives decisive support. The *way* in which they were hearing now was different from the *way* in which they had heard at the outset. Then the seed was sown on "good ground", now it was falling "by the wayside". Consequently, they still knew "how" to "hear" it properly, if only they would take the pains to set themselves to the task. They had heard it properly once. In τήρει the full force of the present is hard to express. It exhorts the Church of Sardis to get into "the abiding habit" (Alford) of **keeping on guard.** The "hold fast" (A.V.) and the "keep it" (R.V.) are about equally colorless as translations, and lose sight altogether

of the figure in mind. The word is used here as in Matt. 27:36, 54, Acts 12:6, and 16:23, and 25:21. "Get back on duty", says Christ to the Church of Sardis, "stand on guard"—which of course would be impossible unless the members should first "waken up" (v. 2). Ποίαν ὥραν—not "what hour" merely, but **what sort of an hour,** they would be taken off their guard completely. Self-evidently—though on that account it needs to be noted none the less, perhaps all the more—ἥξω ἐπὶ σέ means **to come upon** one *providentially,* not corporeally; in fact, Christ *had already arrived.*

4. This verse deals, figuratively, with nothing but the common everyday experience of the true Christian. The few whose garments are spoken of as being undefiled are simply those who had 'kept themselves unspotted from the world'. The impossibility of sinlessness in the flesh is assumed here, as everywhere else in the Bible. Paul exhorts Timothy to "keep"—not to keep in his pocket or on a shelf in his library, but **to keep his eye on, to observe** (τηρήσαι)—"the commandment, without spot, without reproach" (I Tim. 6:14). And Timothy did it. It is worth while also to note that in the words just quoted from Jas. 1:27 it is τηρεῖν again that is used; "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father" is, for one thing, **to keep oneself constantly on guard,** so as not to get a spot from the world. Christ did this when He foiled Satan at every turn. The Christian can do it too—approximately; far enough at least to show that he is "walking" and working "with" Christ and not "with" Satan. John has already pictured Christ (1:13 and 2:1) as One who is walking about

among the golden candlesticks to oversee and forward the contract of man's salvation. These few, then, who had kept on their guard against self-sufficiency with all that it entails were in consequence qualified and "worthy" to be found in the company and in the service of Christ; they were a credit to the cause; in point of worthiness they were in position to recommend the gospel of the Son of God to a fallen race. **Defilement** (μολυσμός) may be either fleshly or spiritual (II Cor. 7:1). See also I Cor. 8:7 and Rev. 14:4. Here it is an attitude of mind; they have not marred their influence by harboring the spirit and assuming an air of self-complacency.

5. Verse five resumes (οὕτως) the thought of verse four, and pins it to the ground, as it were. There is to be no soaring away in imagination to the heights of heaven; it is the plain homely duties of earth that Christ is talking about here. He who keeps defeating the powers of darkness continuously by keeping the sentinel of his soul on duty all the time—he will not likely have any such work as that to do in heaven—shall be "arrayed in white garments". To 'walk with Christ **in white**' (ἐν λευκοῖς) is to be right at heart, is to be **"worthy"** (ἄξιος). To be 'clothed **in white garments**' (ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς) is to have that inner whiteness become visible and produce effects as an influence for righteousness. So also with the two clauses that follow. Their significance is present, at least mainly. The Church of Sardis, spiritually speaking, was a **corpse** (νεκρός). Unless it should experience a resurrection, its "name" would have to be taken from the lists. The "few" were *living*, had entered on the life that never ends, and since

they were faithful, and loyal to their King, and could never die, there could be no banishment and no erasures. As for their open acknowledgment, this may be thought of as taking place at the Judgment, but even so it is mentioned here *for present encouragement.* The 'measure' of the Church of Sardis as a whole was not 'filled up' in **the sight of God** (ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ); the measure of the "few", on the contrary, was full **in the sight of the Father** (ἐνώπιον τοῦ Πατρός), and **in the sight of His angels** (ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ); in the sight, that is to say, of any and every person who can see and appreciate moral values.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

To the Church of Sardis, in so far as it has functioned or may yet function as a messenger of light, write:

These things says He in whose service the Holy Spirit, in all the fulness of His sevenfold perfection, is on the alert all the time, and who possesses in Himself that sevenfold irradiation that makes Him a Light to lighten the world. I know your contract, nothing has escaped me, and though nominally you are alive while in reality you are dead, I do not propose to allow the contract I assigned you to become wholly abortive; hence this letter. Rise from the dead. Begin to be as one who keeps watching. I looked into your life and affairs. Nearly everything was gone, and the few things of any value that did remain were on the point of dying. The fact is, I have found that you have not fulfilled your contract, and are not fulfilling it today, as my God sees contracts. He will not accept it at your hands, nor will I. Remember, then, how you have received the message from

the first even down to the present instant, and how for a time, when it first reached you, you listened to it. Waken up and go on guard, and change your mind and attitude once for all and irreversibly. You know the history of your city—how it was taken twice, because the sentinels had fallen asleep and neglected their duties. If you do not arouse yourselves, I will surprise you as those sentinels were surprised, and I will guarantee that you will not be able to forecast the kind of predicament you will be in when the surprise comes. I warn you to waken up while it is time, for the next time I come it will be too late. And what is more, you may be sure that I will come.

However, while as a Church you in Sardis have a name to live and are dead, you yet have in your membership a few who have a name to live, and live. They have not permitted themselves to touch even so much as the hem of your self-complacency. Inasmuch as they have taken me as their example, and have kept on their guard unceasingly in all directions, they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. They are sentinels that may be counted on. And as they are white in their inner life, they shall be clothed in garments that are white, for naturally their influence in the world will be of a kind with their character. Furthermore, since they are not dead, and shall never die, their names will never be taken from the book of life. They will be on the roll of honor eternally, and I will make public acknowledgment of them and of their services before the assembled universe in the day of Judgment. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to the Christian church on the sin of self-sufficiency.

Chapter Three, verses 1–6.

CHAPTER XII

THE LETTER TO SARDIS

A Message Concerning the Fatality of Over-Confidence

THE Greeks regarded Sardis as the greatest of all cities. It was the capital of Lydia, a formidable kingdom in its time, for in its palmiest days its boundaries were practically conterminate with the whole of Asia Minor. It was "a city set on a hill", for it crowned a commanding plateau fifteen hundred feet above the plain. The rock rose perpendicular, and was thought to be unscalable, on every side except the south. And even on the south it was next to inapproachable. Much of the kingdom's glory and renown dated from the days when Croesus was its king—Croesus, the far-famed multimillionaire of the ancient world, who occupied the throne in Sardis about half a millennium before the days of Christ, and whose wealth in jewels and costly stones and other accumulated treasure, in addition to such common things as gold and silver, was said to be unreckonable. From the days of Croesus Sardis lived in story. Herodotus, about a century after the event, tells us how that Solon, the Solomon of Greece, as he journeyed through the nations, visited this wealthy monarch on his lofty citadel, how that Solon was conducted through the king's possessions and allowed to survey his opulence and grandeur, how that Croesus, after Solon had reviewed his priceless treasures, asked him whom he deemed to be

the happiest man on earth, and how that Solon, in concluding his reply, had said, "No human being is self-sufficient in every respect—something is always lacking. He who unites the greatest number of advantages, and, retaining them to the day of his death, then dies peaceably, that man, and that man alone, sire, is, in my judgment, entitled to bear the name 'happy'. So, in every matter it becomes us to mark well the end, for oftentimes the divinity gives men a gleam of happiness, and then submerges them in ruin". This was not exactly what Croesus had expected of his guest. Accordingly, as Herodotus informs us, he dismissed the wise old philosopher without any unnecessary ceremony, because he thought that a man who took no account of present good, but advised men always to "wait and mark the end", could be nothing but an arrant fool.

A few years roll by, however, and Cyrus with his armies is besieging Sardis. All the plain below the city is one wide sea of armed men. But Croesus still maintains his equilibrium and rests at ease. Is he not safe within his lofty fortress? An attack is made, but the hosts of Cyrus are held at bay or driven back almost without a struggle. Why should Croesus be disturbed? At this point, however, and unfortunately for Croesus, the unexpected begins to happen. A certain man resolves "to approach the citadel and attempt it at a place where no guards were ever set", at a place where the rock is so "precipitous and impracticable" that no one would ever think of scaling it. The sequel is not hard to anticipate. "He climbed the rock himself", says Herodotus, "and other Persians followed in his track, until a large number had mounted to the

top. Thus was Sardis taken, and given up entirely to pillage."

But one lesson, it would seem, was not enough for Sardis, for similarly three hundred and thirty years later, Antiochus the Great repeated the experiment. As we read the story from the pages of Polybius and compare it with the present letter to the Church of Sardis, it would be difficult not to believe that John too had read Polybius. "At last", says Polybius, "when the siege had already entered upon its second year, Lagoras the Cretan came forward. He had had a considerable experience in war, and had learned that as a rule cities fall into the hands of their enemies most easily from some neglect on the part of their inhabitants, when, trusting to the natural or artificial strength of their defences, they fail to keep proper watch and ward and become fatally indifferent. He had observed, too, that in such fortified cities captures were effected at the points of greatest strength, which were believed to have been despaired of by the enemy. . . . Accordingly, under the cover of night, he went to the spot, (which from watching the vultures he had surmised was unguarded), and carefully examined the possibilities of approaching it and setting up ladders. . . . Having held a consultation on the whole subject, (he and his associates) waited for a night on which there should be no moon just before daybreak." At length, "when Lagoras and his party had made all their preparations, as soon as the moon set, they came stealthily to the foot of the cliffs with their scaling ladders, and ensconced themselves under a certain overhanging rock". Then Polybius goes on to relate how the citadel was sur-

prised, and how the army, which had become so self-confident in its security, was finally overpowered and put to rout—adding, as a closing sentence, that even after the battle had been decided Lagoras and his party "remained on the ground near the theatre, determining with great good sense and soldier-like prudence to form a reserve until the whole operation was completed".

Now in connection with the letter to Sardis those last words are exceptionally pertinent and peculiarly striking. They may be said to contain in epitome the whole message of the letter. They are susceptible of a somewhat different rendering, which, while it amounts to the same thing, may serve to locate and particularize the emphasis to a slightly better advantage. Polybius tells us that Lagoras and his men, after the battle, planted themselves in a strategic position, "resolving judiciously and with practical prudence to keep on their guard continuously at every conceivable point." It is hardly possible to imagine that the writer of the letter to the Church of Sardis was unacquainted with that statement. It constitutes the key-note of his message.

With these characteristic features of the city's history, then, every intelligent citizen of Sardis in the days of John, we may be sure, was perfectly familiar. The sayings of Solon—that "no human being is self-sufficient in every respect", that "something is always lacking", and that "in every matter it becomes us to mark well the end"—were common property. The folly of Croesus, in leaving any part of his stronghold so unprotected that an enemy could "approach the citadel at a place where no guards were ever set", was proverbial. How Lagoras and his party

had won the war for Antiochus the Great by scaling the cliffs "like a thief" in the night, was a household story. Nor would it be easy for the citizens of Sardis to forget the wisdom of Lagoras and his men, when they resolved "judiciously and with practical prudence", even in the day of victory, "to keep on their guard continuously at every conceivable point". In fact, the history of Sardis seems to have been providentially moulded to the end that it might serve to objectify that exhortation of Paul to the Corinthians—"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".

The description of Christ that stands at the head of this letter to the Church of Sardis introduces the theme of the letter with infinite nicety. It is as much as to say, that in the care of Him who has "the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars" there needs to be no point at which the enemy of souls can scale the walls of the citadel of life, like a thief in the night, when the moon is set. It assures the child of God that if he keeps true to form he can have nothing to fear, that if he keeps on guard side by side with Him who "keeps the city" there need never be a moment when he cannot sing—

"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved:
He that keepeth thee will not slumber.
Behold, He that keepeth Israel
Will neither slumber nor sleep.
Jehovah is thy keeper:
Jehovah is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day,

Nor the moon by night.
Jehovah will keep thee from all evil;
He will keep thy soul.
Jehovah will keep thy going out and thy coming in
From this time forth and for evermore".

As much as this lies on the surface, but we must burrow deeper if we would hit upon those inner relationships out of which such assurance grows. Why does our Lord describe Himself here as the One who has "the seven Spirits of God"? Speaking of the baptism at the Jordan, Godet, with excellent insight, remarks that "John saw the Spirit in the form of a dove, that is to say, in its living totality, descending and abiding upon Him". Similarly also the Apostle John, in the third chapter of his Gospel, quotes Jesus as saying that it was not "by measure" that the Father had given Him the Spirit—not by measure, but in "its living totality", as Godet so aptly interprets the figure of the dove. Or again, we may think of Christ as the One who has "the seven Spirits of God", because in Him, as Paul says, "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily". By this expression, "the seven Spirits", Alford holds that we have spread out before us the fulness of the Godhead in all its attributes and energies. "These Spirits", he says, "this plenitude, Christ, the Lord of the church, possesses, is clothed and vested with, in all fulness. From Him the spiritual life of His church comes as its source, in all its elements of vitality. He searches all the depths both of our depravity and of His own applications of grace. He has in His hand all the Spirit's power of conviction. He

wields the fire of purification, and the fire of destruction. Whether the Spirit informs, or rebukes, or warns, or comforts, or promises, whether He softens or hardens men's hearts, it is Christ, who, searching the hearts as Son of God, and feeling their feelings as Son of man, wields and applies the one and manifold Spirit". This comment of Alford's leaves little to be said. To speak of Christ as having "the seven Spirits of God" is to affirm that He *is* God, that He sees everything there is to be seen, that His eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him", even as He shows Himself forward "with the froward"—in short, that "there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight", and consequently that no enemy, even though 'the moon be set,' can assail the citadel of the soul and evade His observation, or on the other hand, that no soul can lapse into indifference and self-sufficiency without being seen of Him and sentenced to pay the penalty.

"Jehovah is in His holy temple;
Jehovah—His throne is in heaven;
His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.
Jehovah trieth the righteous;
But the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth".

A man may love God or not, he may be on his guard against every form of iniquity that attempts to clamber over the walls of the heart, or he may intrench himself behind the flimsy battlements of ease and careless self-complacency, but in the end he has no option but to look up into heaven, and say—

"Even the darkness hideth not from thee,
But the night shineth as the day:
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee".

All this, however, shows but half. In addition to "the seven Spirits of God", our Lord declares that He has "the seven stars". To begin with, let it be noted particularly that this expression has a meaning of its own. When Christ speaks of Himself as holding "the seven stars in His right hand", that is one thing; when He speaks of Himself as having or possessing "the seven stars", that is another, and quite a different, thing. By declaring that He holds "the seven stars in His right hand", He practically says, "Ye are the light of the world", by declaring that He has "the seven stars" Himself, He practically says, "I am the light of the world". And this was precisely what the Church of Sardis needed to be reminded of. It had "a name to live", but "was dead". It was "self-sufficient". It had many places "where no guards were ever set". It had fallen away from the sublime example of Christ. As for Christ, when Satan suggested that He should turn stones into bread, He was on His guard at that point; when the same shrewd Deceiver suggested again that He should put the Father to the test by making a display of Himself for effect, He was on His guard at that point; and when the persistent old Serpent suggested a third time that He should secure the homage of the nations without purchasing the right to it by His death on the cross, He was on His guard at that point. He was on His guard when the people tried to take Him by force and make Him a King. He was

on His guard when Peter undertook to persuade Him to evade the crucifixion. He was on His guard when the sight-seers on Calvary reviled Him and cried, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross". In the words of Polybius, He had resolved, albeit He was God, to keep on His guard "continuously at every conceivable point". In this respect, therefore, as in all others, He had "the seven stars", and was accordingly "the light of the world". He had "a name to live", for since He had "the seven Spirits of God" He had the reputation of being able to see with an omniscient eye; He did live, for in point of character He possessed "the seven stars"—the pure white light of immaculate holiness. And what He claimed to be, and was, showed itself in what He did. His inner character clothed itself "with light as with a garment". Since the Church of Sardis accordingly knew that Christ could see, and that He was the one true light of the world, it could have no excuse for being ignorant of the sentence awaiting it in case of continued self-complacency and lack of watchfulness. Thus the epithet with which the letter opens fairly scintillates with a divinely delicate applicability.

Now the Church of Sardis was "dead", and manifestly because of its sense of self-security and lack of thoroughness. As with Ephesus, so with this Church, the trouble was invisible. Outwardly all was well. Its reputation was flattering. It had the "name". If any person could say that he was a member of the Church of Sardis, that was enough—

> "His stature reach'd the sky, and on his crest
> Sat honour plumed".

Sardis was the "live Church" of its day, the "going concern". It could "tabulate results". Whatever Christ might think of it, in its own estimation it was a credit to the whole of Asia Minor, if not to the whole of Christendom as it then existed. Undeniably it was the Church of renown. But oh what an atomic thing that was, and such things are, in the eye of God! How long will it take mankind to learn that nothing counts with God except what goes on in the heart? The "outward appearance" settles things for us poor little mincing manikins on earth; the Lord looks deeper. With Him a "name to live" amounts to nothing when it happens to be fastened to a corpse. As a Church, Sardis was "dead"—"dead in trespasses and sins", an assemblage who had made a profession of faith before the world, but who were living in defilement, as the language of the letter indirectly asserts. For if some few had not 'defiled their garments', the natural implication is that the others had. The Church of Sardis was only 'nominally' Christian.

The interesting question here is—What kind of a "contract" could such a Church have been entrusted with? For, to the Church of Sardis as to each of the others in this group of four, Christ says, "I know thy contract". When we stop to consider, however, that it was Christ Himself that gave it its contract, the answer, in the light of the city's history, reinforced as it is by the text of the letter, is obvivious. What the history of the city of Sardis put the Church of Sardis in position to exemplify, as perhaps no other Church on earth could have done so well, comes precisely to this—that it is utterly impossible for any

human being to reach and occupy such a pinnacle in Christian life as will make it safe for him, even for so much as a single moment, to be off his guard. Sardis was so circumstanced as to have within its grasp the means of illuminating that truth, on its positive side, to the limits of human capacity. It failed in this, but even its failure was laid hold upon by Christ in such a way as to illustrate the truth for all time to come. I know thy contract, says Christ, and in the presence of my God, who sees things as I see them, I have found thy contract unfulfilled. He refused, accordingly, to take it off their hands, as we say, though He afforded them another opportunity to make good by complying with the original specifications.

The perfect tense that confronts us in " I have found" presupposes a previous investigation, and that the conditions ascertained on that occasion were still unchanged at the moment of writing. And these conditions are stated in the letter. In military terms, the first was, that the guard was asleep, and the second was, that the few points in the citadel that had not already been captured were on the verge of being lost. But a sleeping sentry is a criminal. Consequently the first injunction to the Church of Sardis is to "waken up". Come to be what now you are not, says Christ,—a congregation that keeps its eyes open, a congregation in whose estimation "watching" is a cardinal virtue. Of course, in its own view, as also in the view of its neighbors—for its "name" was good as far as its name was known—the Church of Sardis easily outranked the rest of the Churches in point of efficiency. So far as we know, it had no Balaamites or Nicolaitans, and no Jezebel-

ites. How proud it would be of that! In fact, to use the figure that the context supplies, it regarded its "measure" as "full". But when its "measure" was brought "before God", all that it really contained was but as "a drop in a bucket". When Christ who had "the seven Spirits of God", when Christ in whom dwelt all "the fulness" of the Godhead bodily, looked into its life, it was found to be nothing but a hollow, empty shell. This is always true when men "put on airs", or as Paul says, "think of themselves more highly than they ought to think". What such persons need, whether they are church-members or not, is an awakening. They need to be brought to their feet. They are "without understanding", as Paul says again, for they spend their time "measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves". But the man who does not 'like to retain God in his knowledge' as the only perfect standard of measurement is always given over by God to "a reprobate mind", which is but to say, to a mind that is without any ethical standard whatsoever. If we do not make the mind and judgment of the living God Himself the sole criterion for the regulation of our lives, we have nothing, as Prior puts it, to

"Imprint on every act its standard worth".

In fact, as Teufelsdröckh exclaims, "We clutch at shadows as if they were substances, and sleep deepest while fancying ourselves most awake!" And "this dreaming", he adds, "this somnambulism is what we on earth call life, wherein the most, indeed, undoubtingly wander as if they knew right hand from left, yet they only are wise who know that they know nothing". The Bible assumes, from first to

last, that apart from a proper conception of God, and of the things which the holiness of God demands of men, the human race has no touchstone for the measurement of moral conduct or of ethical excellence of any kind. To the Corinthians Paul says, "Prove your own selves"; similarly, to his readers the Apostle John says, "Prove the spirits"—by which he means the spirits of men who were claiming to be prophets; and then, as though to leave no loophole whatsoever, Paul says to the Thessalonians, "Prove all things"—to which he adds an explanation which it would be impossible not to understand, by saying, "Hold fast that which is good, abstain from every form of evil". Prove your own selves, prove other men, prove everything. And the sublime thing about it all is the fact that in the very structure of that word "prove", which the Apostles use, there lies imbedded the architectural idea of the perfect standard. Christian life, in every aspect of it, must measure itself continuously by the immaculate criterion of the Triune God. This is the truth which the Church of Sardis was providentially adapted to exemplify. It could have shown mankind that though, like the city itself, it had been set on a pinnacle in point of opportunity and advantage, it had yet felt acutely the deep-seated need of keeping Christ in its thought as the only worthy ideal of Christian character, and of keeping on its guard continuously, lest at any time it should seem to come short as touching that beauty of holiness in heart and life which alone can elicit the approval of God. It was in position to have vindicated the sentinel's function in Christian experience, but alas, when the Great Contractor, on making His rounds, had

entered the city of Sardis, He found His trusted sentinel fast asleep. As Commander-in-Chief of the armies of the living God He could have justly sentenced the miscreant sentry to immediate death, but instead of that He simply brings His slumbering servant back to consciousness. He is not willing that any should perish; "wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light".

But the Church of Sardis had slept so long that nearly everything was gone. Nearly everything; for what remained, while it bulked large in the estimation of men, amounted to little in the sight of God. It had a "name to live", was more or less illustrious; and that, of itself, had there been any substantial facts to support it, would have been a good thing, something worthy to be established, for a "good name is rather to be chosen than great riches". Doubtless also the mode of formal worship had suffered few or no modifications; and all the regulations as well for preserving discipline and order, we may safely assume, had been kept intact; for such things as these would be the very kind of considerations that would be calculated to give the Church of Sardis its excellent "name". And these things were good in their place. As Christ said to the Pharisees, so He could have said, and to all intents and purposes did say, to the membership in Sardis, "These things ought ye to have done". If men have the "form of godliness" and lack its "power", the thing for them to do is not to cast aside the empty form, but rather to learn to prize the form at its proper value and have it filled with what it lacks. This, in fact, is the import of Christ's words

when He commands the Church of Sardis to "establish the things that remain". Even these outward and formal things, as He had found on making His rounds, "were ready to die". Thought of as receptacles that ought to have been full, they were dried up and ready to fall apart. They were empty, mere vacuums. They have not been 'filled out', says Christ, "before my God". Our petty human estimates—how little they amount to! Why will men forget that they are under the scrutiny and inspection of an eye that is omniscient, where even the faintest attempt at pretense or mere appearance is perfectly transparent! Think of coming "before God" with a contract faultily fulfilled and trying to pass it off in His sight as solid and substantial, a piece of finished workmanship! How great and gracious God is, to grant men added opportunities to make good, after their conduct has thus reached the "maximum of detestability"!

Now to right itself "before God" the first thing that the Church of Sardis would have to do would be to refresh its memory with respect to its connection with the whole system of grace. It was essential that it should remember how the truth had been brought, and was still being brought within its reach, and how, for a while at least, it had listened to the truth. At the moment then present the truth was coming to Sardis by the pen of an apostle. What it had "received", and was yet receiving, bore the imprint, and was guaranteed by the sanctions, of divine authority. It is true, of course, that we have no direct information as to how or when the Church of Sardis was founded, but the language in the phrase before us is so calculatingly precise

as to warrant the conclusion, that what was true as touching the manner in which the gospel was reaching them when this letter was being written, had been true from the first. The Church of Sardis may have been founded by Paul during his two years' residence at Ephesus, for we are told in the Acts that during that time all that "dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks". Or if not founded by Paul or one of his associates at so early a date, it may have been founded by John himself, for that John had been laboring in this very vicinity for fully a quarter of a century admits of no reasonable doubt. At all events, by whomsoever founded, it must have become familiar at an early period with the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, as also with the Gospel and Epistles of John practically as soon as the Apostle had written them. The present letter, accordingly, was but a continuation of its authoritative guidance. The grammar is explicit—Remember how you have received from the first, and are receiving yet; and it carries with it the implication that the truth had come to Sardis in its limpid purity, under the immediate supervision of the Holy Spirit, reinforced by unmistakable apostolic sanctions, and that Sardis, therefore, in so far as it had fallen short, was without excuse. The present deplorable condition of the Church of Sardis was not the result of ignorance, or of faulty instruction, but of deliberate perversity. Not a very pleasant thing to "remember", perhaps, but the excellence of Christianity is that it requires us to wrestle with facts, whether pleasant or not.

All along, therefore, the truth, when we think of it as

coming to the Church of Sardis from without, came to it in a form that was infallibly perfect. It was "received" in good condition. Also, at the first, it was accepted and appropriated in the proper way. For a time the word spoken "fell into the good ground, and grew, and brought forth fruit a hundredfold". They that received it were "such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience". As much as this we know, for otherwise there would have been no Christians in Sardis at all. Saving grace becomes ours, inwardly, only when we lay hold of it with "an honest and good heart". This, Christ tells us, the converts at Sardis did do at the outset. "Remember", He says, "how you did hear at one time". Time was when the gospel came to them as it came to the Thessalonians—not "in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance". Indeed, the early resemblance and the later contrast between Thessalonica and Sardis is intrinsically illuminating. They began alike—with good and honest hearts. The Thessalonians, Paul tells us, set out right and continued "in much assurance"—a remarkable expression, when considered in connection with what our Lord says to the Church of Sardis. For "assurance" here let us substitute the word "fulness", as in the margin of the Revision. The Thessalonians accepted Christ with fervor, and then set themselves sincerely to make their lives 'measure up to the brim' of their profession. In other words, they kept on the alert and aimed to 'fulfill their contract'. Sardis, on the contrary, fell asleep and left its contract unfulfilled. Or, to put it in terms of the linguistic

picture which lies enshrined in the word "assurance", the men of Thessalonica, after they had accepted Christ, came to Him, as the years rolled by, 'bringing their chalice full'; whereas the men of Sardis, after they had accepted Christ, came to Him, as the years rolled by, bringing their chalice empty. Is it any wonder, then, that Thessalonica had "a name to live"? "Ye became an ensample to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia", says Paul, "for from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God-ward is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything". Thessalonica, because it came to Christ with a full cup, or with its contract fulfilled, which is but to say, because it lived up to the high ideal with which it started out, had "a name to live", and lived. It rose into fame, and had a right to rise. Paul puts his seal on that. Sardis, since it had abandoned the divine ideal that had brought it into being, was pilloried in the eyes of all the world, and justly pilloried, as "dead".

With these facts recalled and kept vividly in mind the Church of Sardis would be supplied with all the data necessary to its rehabilitation. There was nothing equivocal, nothing uncertain, in the way the truth had come to Sardis. The message had reached the Church authoritatively and at first-hand. At the beginning, also, it had heard the gospel with joy, and had laid hold on "the unspeakable gift" it offered with sincerity and commendable zeal. It knew how to do that. Moreover, it knew, or on reading this letter, would know, how dead it had been in recent years, and who it was that pronounced it "dead". The

Church of Sardis was in no need of suffering from any dearth of information.

Acquainting themselves with the facts, however, would not be enough; they must utilize them. Accordingly, Christ exhorts them to get back to the original contract; to do what their Church had been called into existence to do; to put the brand of infamy on the sin of self-security by showing the necessity, even where no necessity seemed to exist, of keeping on their guard continuously at every conceivable point. And not only to do it, but so to change their minds as to become aware that it is impossible to be Christians without doing it. The obligation to keep the inner eye busy with self-inspection is essential and imperative. The only way to live in safety, as regards the eye of God, is to cultivate that frame of heart and mind which will keep us saying, to the very end of life, "Lest I myself should be a castaway." The man who has places in his soul "where no guards were ever set" is a heedless criminal. And time will tell it. Christ says that if such a one will not repent and reverse his attitude, He will come upon him unexpectedly, and that the person thus overtaken shall be unable to forecast not "the hour" simply, but the "kind of hour", the type of circumstance, the variety of predicament, in which Christ shall choose to surprise him. And He who has "the seven Spirits of God", we may well believe, will be at no loss to keep His word, when the time comes. The lack of watchfulness is not an unpardonable sin—else it would have been useless to write these admonitions to the Church of Sardis—but it is an expensive sin; for where it does not terminate in a total loss of character,

as it so often does, it yet ends in inevitable infamy, which no noble mind, even though the sin be pardoned, can ever recall without chagrin and deep regret. Those words of Christ to His disciples—what man on earth can afford to disregard them for a moment?—"What I say unto you I say unto all, WATCH".

The latter part of this letter opens with a touch of unsurpassable artistry. Considered collectively the Church of Sardis had "a name to live" and was "dead". This, however, was not true of all the members individually. A few of these not only had "a name to live", but did live, and lived intensely. It is not without significance that Christ says, I have a few "names" in Sardis. The few had a name to live, and had a right to it. They lived so circumspectly that they had not allowed even their garments to come in contact with the "dead" body of the Church of Sardis taken as a whole. The letter is a unit. The same general figure, with its appropriate mode of thought, pervades it from the beginning to the end. As an entity the Church of Sardis was a corpse. To touch it by even so much as the hem of one's garments, spiritually speaking, was to become defiled. Surrounded by overweening self-sufficiency on every side, these few, whom our Lord by this reference has made illustrious, maintained their integrity, amazed at the majesty and mercy of God as they moved about amid the ruins of pride, and were led to perceive in the lives of their comrades the fathomless depths of depravity into which the spirit of haughty indifference can plunge the human soul. The sin of self-security, self-complacency and unconcern they held in abhorrence. "Touch not the

unclean thing" was their motto. Accordingly, Christ says that they had not "defiled their garments". The language is pictorial and spiritual, but it has a ceremonial cast. Under the law a man who had touched a dead body had to purify himself, and had to "wash his clothes". But this little remnant in Sardis had no need to "wash their clothes", for with respect to the particular sin in question they had not become contaminated. Indeed, they had kept themselves so clear of it that Christ Himself could say, "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy". But the whiteness of Christ's life consisted, for one thing, as we have seen already, in the infinite pains He took to keep Himself on guard continuously "at every conceivable point" against the methods of the devil. They walk with Christ in white, therefore, who perform the functions of a faithful sentinel and keep their hearts with such diligence as to make them worthy to appear in company with their Lord and Master as His accredited agents for the evangelization of the world. Moreover, says Christ, he who thus overcomes the armories of darkness shall be "arrayed in white garments". When the inner man is white, his influence will be white. Christ gives His people a power in the world precisely in keeping with their character. When the soul within is "worthy", it clothes itself with light as with a garment. The "beauty of holiness" which was held to be of such infinite value by the faithful few in Sardis has woven their influence for righteousness into the fabric of nineteen centuries, and their effect for good has been multiplied by as many millions as have entered into glory from that day to this. Is there any raiment on earth to

be compared with that? As Christ's sentinels they had neither slumbered nor slept; they had been found faithful; they had become famous; they should be clothed accordingly.

More than that, their names should not be erased from the roll of the living. The only death that amounted to anything, they could laugh out of countenance. It was palsied in their presence. Before them it stood nerveless and impotent. They could not "be hurt of the second death". The figure here is not abandoned; on the contrary, in this and the following statement it is brought to a climax. When a citizen died or a soldier was killed, a corresponding erasure was made on the appropriate list where his name had appeared. It was a commonplace custom. It needed no explanation. It was a mere matter of official routine. But these few in Sardis would never die. They had passed from death unto life, "even life for evermore". Through ages unending, therefore, there should be no occasion to blot their names from "the book of life", for their lives were "hid with Christ in God"; as long as He lived would they live; the eternal years of God were theirs. Is it not worth while to be a faithful sentinel on life's great battlefield, when we know that of every faithful sentinel the Lord Christ Himself has said, "I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life"?

And then finally the honor of it all! "I will confess his name", says Christ, "before my Father, and before His angels". Think of what that means! When the moment comes for their release, Christ appears and ushers these few faithful sentinels of Sardis into His Father's presence, and

into the presence of those uncountable messengers of light that surround His Father's throne. All heaven lapses into silence to hear what the Captain of Salvation is about to say. Can we not see it all in the mind's eye? What if Christ were to break the silence of that august assemblage by saying—"O righteous Father, yonder in Sardis, where my cause was at stake, I placed a goodly number of sentinels and commanded them at all hazards to keep awake and watch; all but these few, who are standing before thee, disobeyed my orders and betrayed my trust; these never slumbered nor slept; they kept on their guard continuously at every conceivable point, even where no danger seemed to be possible; I bring them now to thee, for they are worthy"? Instinctively, all heaven, as one vast body, would rise to do them honor. And let us remember that Christ will suffer no faithful servant of His, however humble the position he may occupy, to go unrewarded, for "this honor have all the saints".

Through this letter to Sardis, therefore, he that hath an ear should be able to hear the Holy Spirit saying to the whole church of the living God, everywhere, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".

CHAPTER XIII

PREFATORY TO LECTURE VII

PHILADELPHIA, situated about twenty-eight or thirty miles southeast of Sardis, was a city, as Strabo tells us, σεισμῶν πλήρης (**full of earthquakes**). Also: ἥ τε Φιλαδέλφεια οὐδὲ τοὺς τοίχους ἔχει πιστούς, ἀλλὰ καθ' ἡμέραν τρόπον τινὰ σαλεύσονται καὶ διίστανται· διατελοῦσι δὲ προσέχοντες τοῖς πάθεσι τῆς γῆς καὶ ἀρχιτεκτονοῦντες πρὸς αὐτά,

(**Philadelphia has no trustworthy walls, but daily in one direction or another they keep tottering and falling apart. The inhabitants, however, pursue their original purpose, ever keeping in mind the writhing pangs of the ground, and building with a view to counteracting them.**) Bk. XII, 8.

7. The epithet and the letter are manifestly the offspring of a single thought. Ὁ ἅγιος (**He that is holy**). Trench: "The ἅγιος is the separate from evil, with the perfect hatred of that evil from which he is separate. But holiness in this absolute sense belongs only to God". The Gentiles of Philadelphia may have been worthy of their city's name, but they were sinners. In the presence of Christ, the Holy One, they were as speechless as the man without the wedding garment. In point of holiness, therefore, the missionary had an "open door", whomsoever he approached—whether proud Greek or prouder Pharisee. At bottom, it was a case of white and black. It always is. Ὁ ἀληθινός (**He that is true**). As against Alford, Hort, Charles, et al., Trench's exposition still seems to "sit i' the

centre, and enjoy bright day". After citing John 1:9; 1 John 2:8; John 6:32; John 15:1; Heb. 8:2, he says, with his customary insight into the meaning of words, "In each of these cases the antithesis is not between the true and the false, but between the perfect and the imperfect, the idea fully, and the idea only partially realized. . . . Christ then, in declaring Himself ὁ ἀληθινός declares that whatever names, titles, offices He assumes, these in Him are realized to the full, reach their culminating glory; that the idea and the fact in Him are, what they never are nor can be in any other, absolutely commensurate". Thus again the missionary to the Philadelphians had an "open door". The citizens of Philadelphia might be sincere in their protestations of good will; their claims as touching their integrity and good intentions might be measurably well founded; yet in them "the idea and the fact" could never be "commensurate". There was always room for the message of anyone who could come with the glad tidings of Him who was "holy and true". What lies in these two words is what warrants the missionary to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. They contain an ideal to which no man has attained, or can attain. The truth in them outwits the adversary. It cannot be gainsaid.

In ἅγιος and ἀληθινός (**holy and true**), the thought seems to take its angle mainly, though by no means exclusively, from the Greek or Gentile attitude of mind and heart; in τὴν κλεῖν Δαυείδ (**the key of David**), the approach is from the Jewish side. Ultimately, of course, as Paul says, "there is no difference" (Rom. 3:22), but the Bible takes pains to accost every man after his own order or type of

mentality. The Jews felt that to them had been committed "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). To them accordingly pertained the right to "open" and "shut". Why then should the Christian missionary presume to intrude on their territory? This was their argument. And from their point of view it was perfectly natural and not without its cogency. But in effect Christ replies—"The house is mine; I hold the key of my own house in my own hand; to whomsoever I will I give the right to proclaim my message; moreover, I open and I shut; the sovereignty resides in me". Furthermore, to pass through the figure to the thing signified, the house is simply the human heart. Christ has a way of making the message reach the soul. All the herald has to do is to be faithful. Speaking of the figure in question Alford says, "Most expositors take it to mean . . . an opportunity for the mission work of the church. And this appears to be the true sense here, by what follows in v. 9, promising conversion of those who were now foes".

8. Who can read this verse without noting how intently the eye of the writer is riveted on the immediate moment? Ἰδού (**behold**). Look! Open your eyes right now! Then, the force of the perfects δέδωκα (**I have given**), and ἠνεῳγμένην (**has been opened**). Christ had given them an opportunity, and they were **face to face** (ἐνώπιον) with it at the instant; He had opened the door, and it was still standing open when the statement was being penned. Next comes the present tense; οὐδεὶς δύναται (**no one is able**), as the days come and go, to close this door, though many are putting forth their efforts continuously to do so. Furthermore, conditions then existing are indicated in ἔχεις (**you**

have)—"little is the power you now have". With this the writer shifts back into the past, and employs the aorist. There was a time, a testing time, when, with Christ's word in their mind, they kept on their guard, and refused, on being tempted, to deny His name. In other words, daily events, past and present, are being considered under the microscope of historical science. They are being caught in the camera in the process of coming to pass. Cf. ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (**things which are bound to happen continuously in quick succession**), and ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (**for the suitable situation as regards time and circumstance is near, is at hand, is even now unfolding**),—ch. 1, vv. 1, 3.

9. Again it is the present that confronts us. "Look!" says Christ, In διδῶ (**I am giving**), δέδωκα (**I have given**), is specifically resumed. It amounts to this—I have given you a door that has been opened, and now that you, in your weakness, have had the courage to enter it, I am giving you some out of the synagogue of Satan, some of the most venomous persons on earth, to be your converts; and I will make them come and humble themselves at your feet, that they may know that it is you, and not the Jew who is but a Jew outwardly, whom I love. In fact, the main purpose of this verse is to prove that Christ holds "the key of David". It is true that what the Spirit says to Philadelphia He says "to the Churches", to the church of all ages, and that the truth enunciated in the present verse accordingly may be thought of properly and co-ordinated with the truth enunciated in such passages as Ps. 72:8–11; Is. 2:2–4; Is. 60:14; but the immediate reference is to immediate

existing facts. The writer is dealing with specific instances, which were happening under his own observation or under the observation of his original readers—instances which, of course, were, historically, fulfilments of ancient prophecies, but which, at the moment in question, were not being considered in that light, or if so, only in the remotest degree. Let us do as John did—pin our feet to the ground till we get the machine into flying order; there will be plenty of soaring later on.

10, 11. In this letter two facts occupy the foreground. The first is that a door for the preaching of the gospel had been opened before the Philadelphians. The second is that at a particular crisis, when the temptation not to enter the opened door had become acute, the Philadelphians, weak and all as they were, calmly accepted the situation and entered the door. And now—ὅτι (**because**) they had cherished the word through which Christ's perfect endurance had come to their knowledge, and had acted with Him in mind as their ideal example, and had proclaimed His message at the critical moment, He would surround them with His guardian care in such a way as to enable them to stand forth from the wreck and ruin of time much as the pillars of a temple survive an earthquake. Our word *keep* is not an adequate translation of τηρέω. It means to **keep an eye on**; and more than that, to keep an eye on **with a view to making the most of,** with a view to **getting the most out of,** with a view to **making the best disposal of.** Christ did not keep the Christians of Philadelphia from experiencing the shocks and the catastrophes and the disadvantages of the earthquakes; they shared these

calamities equally with their unregenerate neighbors. What Christ did do was to keep His eye on His friends in Philadelphia in such a way as to have *this letter written to them*—a letter which has made them conspicuous as *pillars* of loyalty and righteousness from that day to this. There is no intimation in this letter that Christians shall not be tested, or shall be kept from being tempted. This never has been so, and from the nature of the case it never can be so. The "hour of trial" is destined ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης (**to come upon the whole inhabited world**). It is "those who dwell upon the earth" that are to be tested; there are no exceptions. The whole meaning of v. 10 concentrates in the preposition ἐκ (**out of**). Christ will **take care** (τηρήσω) that "out of" the calamities and trials the human race is heir to His own followers shall emerge triumphant. Moreover, the guarding referred to in τηρήσω begins on the instant. One duty of a watchman or guardian is to warn, and exhort. Accordingly Christ says, "I come"—for otherwise my coming would not be a test—ταχύ (**suddenly, unexpectedly**); keep on the alert, therefore, hold imperially what you have, continuously, that no one may rob you of the winner's wreath which you are wearing now. Here, at least, the expression translated in our English Versions, "I come quickly", has no reference whatsoever, as the context shows, to the Parousia, so-called, or Second Advent. To hold that it means to come "quickly" in the sense of "soon" is to reflect on the Speaker's veracity, for self-evidently Christ has not come in that sense yet. That Christ comes into lives suddenly and unexpectedly in order to test, discipline and train them, however, is a truth which

can summon every minute of the last nineteen hundred years to support it.

12. Once more, perhaps, it might be well to linger a moment over ὁ νικῶν (**he that overcomes**). Plummer, in the *Pulpit Com.*, says, "The 'overcoming' is a present continuous process, but will have a termination, and then he who has faithfully fought the daily battle will be made *a pillar*, steadfast, immovable". But does not the "present continuous process", the faithful fighting of the "daily battle", *in and of itself* make a man "a pillar, steadfast, immovable"? A man ought to be as steadfast and immovable here as in heaven. It is expected of him (1 Cor. 15:58). Such comments as Meyer's—"As in all the epistles, so here, the concluding promise to the 'victor' (cf. v. 11) proceeds to the time of eternal glory after the coming of the Lord"; and Alford's –"He (as a pillar) shall have a fixed and important place in the glorified church hereafter", since this promise, as well as "the corresponding promises", "all refer to the blessings of the future state in glory", are of "poor validity". That the "overcoming" is a "present continuous process" is grammatically unassailable. The cast of thought demands it. The question is not—When shall Christians die and ascend into the New Jerusalem? but—When shall the New Jerusalem descend into the hearts of men on earth, so that they may really live? In fact, the essential contention of the whole Apocalypse is that a Christian should be a Christian, and not a mere figurehead, *while here in the flesh*; that he should stand like "a pillar" against worldliness and wrongdoing every day of his earthly life, or, to use Isaiah's simile, "like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land".

As for the remaining clauses in v. 12, they are dealt with at length in the Lecture.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

And to the Church in Philadelphia write: These things says He who is immaculately and inapproachably holy, He in whom the actual measures up with the ideal, He who holds the key of David, who opens so that no man can shut, and shuts so that no man can open. I know the contract which you have on hand. Look! Right before you I have set a door that has been opened, and remains open, since no man, try as he may, is able to close it. So, I say, I know your contract, because the notable thing about the power you have is that it is infinitesimal, and the problem you are here to illustrate, accordingly, is, what a prodigious task an infinitesimal power, when properly directed, can accomplish. At a crucial moment in the hour of temptation you kept your eye centred on my word, and scorned the very thought of denying my name. Look around you and observe the incidents of the hour. Even at the present moment I am giving you some out of the synagogue of Satan, some who declare themselves to be Jews, but who, in the true sense, are not Jews at all, who, in fact, are but whited sepulchres full of hypocrisy and lies—some of these, your bitterest enemies, I am giving you even now as converts to the faith. And note this—I will make them so loyal to myself and so grateful to you that they will come and prostrate themselves at your feet, and shall know in their heart of hearts and acknowledge that it is you, and not merely those who can say, "We have Abraham to our

father", whom I have loved. Because you kept your attention riveted on the word which informed you how I endured the contradiction of sinners against myself, and followed my example, I also will rivet my attention on you, that I may bring you out into prominence in the hour of trial which is always in the act of coming on the whole inhabited world, with a view to bringing all the dwellers of earth to the touchstone, to reveal what is in them. Keep in mind that I come at times when I am not expected, much as a thief comes in the night; and hold on tenaciously to what you have in the way of a good record, that no one may outstrip you, and win the right to carry off the victor's garland which is yours today. As for him who overcomes day by day, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall by no means be found outside of that temple again, and I will write upon him the name, the true conception, of my God, and the name, the complete architectural plan and outline, of the city which my God is even now constructing in the world,—the new, that is to say, the ever developing Jerusalem, which is continually coming down out of heaven from my God,—and I will write upon him my own name, which reveals its power anew every time a sinner is reclaimed from destruction. He that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Holy Spirit, through this letter, has proclaimed to the entire church of the living God, concerning any body of Christians which orders its activities, and expends its energies, and measures up to its capacities, as did the Church of Philadelphia.

Chapter Three, verses 7–13.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LETTER TO PHILADELPHIA

A Message Concerning the Church That Has Next to no Resources

IT is unscientific and prejudicial to sound exegesis not to take into account anything and everything that serves to acquaint the mind with the background that lies behind these letters and may have helped to make them vivid to the original readers. Certainly the seven cities were not selected indiscriminately. In the five preceding instances, as we have seen, the tracery discernible in the letters has been a virtual facsimile of the tracery discernible in the history of the cities. In the case of Philadelphia the same impression recurs with unbroken, if not with redoubled, insistence. Even "the lay of the land", as we say, must have been suggestive. Indeed, we may go back of that, and assert that the very name of the city carries within it a sort of 'open door'. Into what nook or cranny of earthly existence will "brotherly love" not find its way?

Philadelphia was the natural gateway from the Hermus valley to an immense plateau, the rim of which stood fully half a mile above the city and further east. It was the portal through which the trade, the mail, the learning, the arts, the civilization, of the west had to pass in order to find an entrance into the wide regions of central and eastern Lydia. Philadelphia, though of course it was not founded

without an eye to military considerations, was really planned with a nobler purpose in view. It was designed to supply those peoples of the highlands toward the east with what today we would call a "university extension course". "The intention of its founder", says Sir William Ramsay, "was to make it a centre of the Graeco-Asiatic civilization and a means of spreading the Greek language and manners in the eastern parts of Lydia and in Phrygia. It was a missionary city from the beginning, founded to promote a certain unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the realm, the apostle of Hellenism in an Oriental land. It was a successful teacher. Before A.D. 19 the Lydian tongue had ceased to be spoken in Lydia, and Greek was the only language of the country". To effect this result it was of immense advantage to Philadelphia that it stood as the last great distributing station on the Postal Route from Rome to the less cultured countries farther inland. The Imperial mail service, starting from the Tiber, traversed the seas to Troas, and from Troas it passed through Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis, and from Sardis, where the trade route and the postal route became identical, it passed to Philadelphia, and thence on to the table-lands of Lydia and the heart of Phrygia. "Along this great route", says Ramsay, "the new influence was steadily moving eastwards from Philadelphia in the strong current of communication that set from Rome across Phrygia towards the distant East". Philadelphia, therefore, according to the means and customs of the times, was uniquely adapted to become the channel through which the news, the inspiration and the advantages of the western civiliza-

tion were to be carried to the darker regions beyond. It was known, and thought of, and spoken of, and designed to be, the city of the "open door".

Philadelphia was built on a broad hill, which had singled itself out, so to speak, from the mountains that stood behind it. We might almost say that it was a city set on a volcano. When Tiberius was Emperor and Jesus was a boy of about twenty, it was practically destroyed by earthquakes. One disastrous earthquake is surely bad enough, but a series of earthquakes, recurring from time to time for months and even years, is more than ordinary mortals are built to stand. Strabo, who survived the main upheaval by as many as six or seven years perhaps, tells us that the walls of Philadelphia were not dependable, and that almost daily, in one direction or another, they were tottering and falling apart. It was astonishing, he asserts, that anyone should ever have thought of founding a city in such a locality. And of those who had the temerity to re-enter the city, even though they were careful to build with a view to withstanding the shocks of future earthquakes, he almost questioned the sanity. He thought that when men were driven from a city by earthquakes they ought to be wise enough not to return. They ought to *go no more in*—as we might say. Many of the inhabitants preferred to live outside of the city, in huts and booths and humble dwelling-places of almost any sort, in order to keep themselves beyond the range of subsequent disasters. The city had been shattered; the citizens kept moving out, or moving away; and for a long time the whole community lived in terror, oppressed by a sense of danger and weakness and

inefficiency, yet determined, if possible, in spite of every obstacle, to realize the ends and aims for which the city had been founded.

Here unfortunately, history lapses into silence, though the letter, if we read between the lines, supplies us with reasonable grounds of conjecture in piecing it out. To begin with, standing pillars, as everyone knows, are a common sight among the ruins of ancient cities. When everything else has toppled to the ground, these seem to be able to hold their own and keep their equilibrium. It may have been so in Philadelphia. The assumption, at least, is not unnatural. The temple-builders were master workmen. They laid the foundations deep and strong. If anything could survive the wrack of earthquakes, it would be the massive columns built on such foundations. Even when the temples themselves might be heaps of ruins, the pillars would stand. They would present the appearance of having been under the protection of some special guardian. "Out of" the wreckage they would emerge as the favorites of fortune.

That something like this is what the letter was meant to convey, however, is rendered more probable still by the way it fits into the web of Philadelphia's history. Tiberius had come to the help of Philadelphia with Imperial munificence. Philadelphia in its gratitude requested the privilege of being permitted to adopt an Imperial name. The request was granted, and the name of the city was changed to Neo-Caesarea. Exactly where the honor was placed by this new name is somewhat doubtful. Whether it is to be taken in the sense of Caesar's New City, thus conferring

the honor on the reigning Tiberius, by whose generosity it was being rebuilt, or in the sense of the City of the New Caesar, thus conferring the honor on Germanicus, who was in Philadelphia at the time as the agent of Tiberius, and who, if he had not been murdered, would almost certainly have been the incoming Emperor, it is perhaps impossible at this distance to say. At all events, a temple was erected to Germanicus. The citizens of Philadelphia inscribed on this new temple the name of the Emperor, which, for them, was the name of their god. Thus the New City was the city of their god, and carried his name, and the New Temple was the temple of their god, and carried his name.

But history, pieced out by probabilities which amount to little less than downright certainties, makes yet further disclosures. After the earthquake Philadelphia was poor. So also were the neighboring cities of the Province, some of which had suffered even more than Philadelphia. These cities accordingly, contrary to the custom of the times, would have to decline to help Philadelphia in the erection of its new temple. As compared with the splendid temples in Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamos, therefore, this new building in Philadelphia would of necessity be but a temporary structure. It was built on zeal and a lack of funds. But enthusiasm is no substitute for granite. Gratitude and earnestness, good in their place, could never buttress the new temple against the vibration of earthquakes. Then, too, Germanicus was murdered, and consequently failed to attain to the full stature of godhood. During the reign of his son Caligula and his brother Claudius, perhaps, there would be some reason to perpetuate his memory, but

after the reign of Claudius neither Germanicus nor the temple erected in his honor is heard of again. Fortune is fickle. Germanicus is forgotten, and within a century his temple is allowed to look like a mass of ruins. And so, in the days when John was writing the Apocalypse, may it not have been that nothing of that Philadelphian temple had been able to survive the tests of time but its lonely pillars? The evidence is not conclusive enough to warrant a flat assertion, but it is probable enough to furnish the mind with a picture, which, even apart from this particular possibility, is undeniably true to the gist and trend of the letter.

Before the Church of Philadelphia, then,—to set out once more from our original point of departure,—a great and effectual door had been opened. The situation is easily reproduced. If there was one thing that Asian cities never failed to do, it was to boast about themselves. Philadelphia, we may be sure, would be no exception. Not for nothing had it received its name of 'brotherly love'. The pride it took in this fine appellation was minted on its coins, and has thus become the possession of the ages. The citizens of Philadelphia would talk of their proverbial kindness, and moderation, and affability, and good will; of their numerous friendships, of their mutual helpfulness; of their faithfulness and missionary zeal in spreading a knowledge of the arts and the blessings of civilization in dark Cimmerian deserts further east; and especially after the earthquake, of their gratitude, and of their loyalty, and of their perseverance in pursuing the original objects for which their city had been founded, and of their patience

in tribulation. One can readily imagine how a citizen of Philadelphia, if approached by a Christian and asked to begin a life that would enable him to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, would turn upon the messenger politely, and say, "All these things have I practised from my youth up; what lack I yet?" But with this letter in his hand the messenger's reply would be, "These things saith He who is holy—He before whose immaculate whiteness your boasted attainments change into the midnight blackness of infinite guilt; these things saith He that is true—He in the presence of whose genuine character your professions of goodness turn out to be but the foam of hypocrisy; these things saith He before whose ineffable purity all flesh must quail, 'Except you repent, you shall perish'." Let them be as rich as Croesus, as wise as Solon, as intellectual as Plato or Aristotle, as illustrious as Xerxes or Alexander or Napoleon, as keen and polished as Matthew Arnold, worldly men are yet but as so many wretched helpless dying sinners in the presence of Christ. The best of them, looking into the calm eye of Jesus, would say instinctively, "I find in Him no fault at all"; whereas, on His part, what could He say but that which He has always said, "Turn ye, turn ye for why will ye die"? The servant of Christ is never without a message for the lost. Before him stands an open door which no man can shut. He who is holy and true has no equal; He may confidently be proclaimed as Saviour anywhere, at any time, and before the perfectest personages this little orb of ours has ever been able to boast of.

For the Church of Philadelphia, then, a door had been opened at least to the Gentiles. But what about the Jews,

who had developed into nothing but a "synagogue of Satan", who claimed to be Jews in reality when in reality they were not Jews at all; who in fact, to be perfectly plain about it, were but an assembly of liars? What about these ingrained enemies of Christ, who held that they, and they alone, had Abraham to their father; who held that they, and they alone, were of the seed of David; who held that they, and they alone, had the right to offer the Gentile what little the Gentile had a right to expect? Could these malicious vilifiers of Christ ever be reached and reclaimed? Was the door not closed, at all events, in that direction? As over against such questions as these can we not feel the import and the power and the sublimity and the appropriateness of those words of the Lord Christ that stand at the head of the letter—"These things saith He that hath the key of David; He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth"? It is Christ who is the Master of David's house, for David's house is Christ's; Christ was David's Lord; it is the King who holds the key, and not the subject. The souls of men are in the hand of Christ. He can open the hardest heart. Is this not precisely what lies before us in the context? "Look", says Christ—if we may render His words so as to accentuate their significance—"Look, even now I am giving you some men out of the synagogue of Satan, out of those, in fact, who say they are Jews and are not, but are simply liars; yes, open your eyes wide, for I will make them come and worship at your feet, and they shall know that it is you that I have loved". No matter by whom we may be surrounded—Jew or Greek, barbarian, Sythian, bond or

free—let us remember that the key is in the hand of David's Lord, that the door has been opened, and that if we fail to enter in with our Saviour's tidings, some one else will 'take our crown'.

What, then, was Philadelphia's special contract? We have seen that it had an open door before it both to Jew and Gentile. But the Church of Philadelphia had one excuse which nothing but its innate nobility of soul fortified by the grace of God kept it back from making—it was weak. How tame our Versions are at this point! The weakness of the Philadelphian Church, as one might say, seems almost to have become contagious when the translators reached this verse. "Little indeèd is the power thou hast" is what Christ said. The position of the words must be translated as well as the words themselves, especially when the position is the one thing that lends character to the sentence. "Only a little power"—that was all that Philadelphia had. But it was magnificent enough not to take any account of that fact. It would proclaim the message anyway, to the uttermost of its ability. To the Greek, in spite of the pride he took in his mentality and superior virtues, and to the Jew, in spite of all the venom which his malicious soul had been capable of absorbing, the Church of Philadelphia, though it was too insignificant to be a respectable laughing-stock to the one or much of a menace to the other, would offer the tidings for what the tidings contained, in the confidence that He who came in the flesh to be the Saviour of sinners would be able to open the doors to the palace of the heart wherever His wisdom would prompt Him to enter. It was this aspect of the church's

problem in the world which Philadelphia was suited historically to exemplify, and it fulfilled its "contract" by sublimely ignoring its limitations, and sealing it home to the minds of men, for all time to come, that no number or kind of hindrances can ever justify the church of Jesus Christ in declining to publish the gospel of redeeming love.

And it was not as though the Church of Philadelphia had not been tested. The tense used here is used with such an insistence as to pin the thought down to a definite moment of history. On a particular occasion—whensoever it may have been, for the verb does not specify the time—but on some particular occasion, says Christ in effect, you did keep your eye on my word and observe it, and you did not deny my name. And when in the tenth verse He refers again to the same fact, He uses the same verb in the same tense. We have already seen that, following the generosity of Tiberius after the earthquakes, Philadelphia's name had been changed to Neo-Caesarea, and a temple had been built in honor of Germanicus. The dedication of this temple, of course, occurred before the crucifixion, and we have nothing to do with it here further than to note it as an episode in history. But what an exciting occasion it must have been! Imagine what would have happened if any man or body of men had deliberately refused to bow the knee and acknowledge Germanicus as god! There would have been a riot in the city of 'brotherly love'. It so happened, however, that about fifty years later, during the reign of Vespasian, just at the time when it is most likely that the Church of Philadelphia was being founded and was accordingly but few in numbers, the city changed

its name again, and called itself Flavia. For fully a quarter of a century the Empire had been constantly humiliated by the vices of Claudius and the madness and debaucheries of Nero, and now, when Vespasian came into power, there was a universal sigh of relief. The new Emperor had risen from the ranks to high command in the army. He was brave on the field, wise and courageous in the affairs of state, free from the vices of the times, fair and equitable in the administration of justice, and never laid himself open, as was so usual in those days, to the charge of extortion or rapacity. Furthermore, he made it possible for illustrious men in the Provinces to become Senators at Rome. In short, he made himself the idol of the Empire. As an expression of its appreciation Philadelphia again requested the privilege of changing its name. Vespasian was the first of the Flavian family in the line of Emperors, and so the city sought the favor of being called Flavia, and its suit was granted. Do you suppose for a moment that Philadelphia would allow such an honor to pass into history without a celebration? Why, at the appointed hour there would be solemn processions moving joyously from every quarter of the city toward the temples; the city would be transformed into a city of worshippers; it would be a moment when every knee would be expected to bow to the name of the new Emperor and every tongue would be required to confess that Vespasian was god.

If this is not the very incident to which the letter refers, it must at least have been one of a similar nature, for with nothing less than such an event can the language of the letter be satisfied. And when fact, and time, and the

suggestion of numerical weakness, and the grammatical construction, and the aspects of thought in the words that are used, all cohere and agree, what more need we ask? We have the picture at least, whether we have the specific moment of time or not. And what a sight it must have been—that little band in Philadelphia facing the scorn and the anger of the Roman Empire, and calmly regarding it all as nothing but an "open door" for proclaiming the Christ! They cherished the "word" that kept before their minds the steadfastness of the Lord Jesus in His hours of trial, and accordingly when the supreme test came they were able to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible". By their loyalty they towered above the wreckage of humanity by which they were surrounded. It made them 'pillars in the temple of God', conspicuous as lofty pines on mountain tops against an evening sky.

It is not difficult in this letter, if we but keep our ear to the ground, to catch the constant rumble of the earthquake. "The hour of trial"—when would any Philadelphian ever hear that phrase without seeing in his mind's eye a panorama of toppling towers and tottering walls and wide-spread uncontrollable desolation? It is true, of course, that Philadelphia's earthquakes only lie within the shadow; they are not even mentioned. Nevertheless the letter fairly quivers with them. The physical catastrophes are held in solution, as it were, only that the thought may broaden out into the vaster upheavals of human society. Geological tragedies are as nothing compared with moral disasters. And how many millions of men, in every generation from John's day to this, have plumed themselves on

their irreligion, counted the cross of Christ of none effect, done despite to the Spirit of grace, and through their hard and atheistic hearts have rocked the earth to its foundations with catastrophes of a moral order that have filled the world with "superfluous death"! As long as men are sinners "it must needs be that offences come". As long as time lasts this world will be but a vast arena for trying and testing character. The "hour of trial" spoken of in this letter is not an hour that comes and goes, and then is done with for ever; it is an hour that is commensurate with time itself; it is a season of experience through which the "whole inhabited world" has to pass and in which every inhabitant of the earth has to take part. "God upheaves the soul as well as the ocean." He rends the heart as well as the mountains. Be it for good or be it for ill, men have to decide. Will they confess that Jesus Christ is God, or will they deny it? As many as deny His name are doomed to destruction, and shall crumble into ruins like the walls of Philadelphia when God shook the earth beneath them; but as many as are brave enough, when the supreme testing moment comes, to stand their ground in the teeth of ridicule and wrath, and acknowledge Christ, as the Philadelphian Christians did, will find themselves towering above the debris of time, when all is over, like those massive columns of antiquity which whole millenniums have sought in vain to level with the dust. Songs of everlasting joy shall be upon their lips, whilst their maligners

> "distill'd
> Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
> Stand dumb".

Christ shall 'keep guard over them', so that "out of" the general mass of ruination they will come into prominence as the great master minds of their respective epochs in the world's history. The man who heralds Jesus Christ is found, when it is too late, to have been the man who, if he had been listened to, would have averted the destruction. His glory usually comes posthumously, but it comes. Christians alone have received "a kingdom that cannot be shaken". But how long will it take the world to learn it?

The closing part of this letter is picturesque, logical, sublime. The figures of speech catch their coloring from the historical background, but they pass beyond it to infinite heights that are all their own. The Christians of Philadelphia had responded successfully and nobly to the tests of the past, and were wearing the wreath of honor to which their loyalty and fidelity had entitled them. But Philadelphia had suffered from more than one earthquake, and there was no telling when others would follow. Seismic eruptions are hard to anticipate. Accordingly Christ says, "I come"—it is a way I have, I am in the habit of coming, "quickly", suddenly, unexpectedly, without warning; and seeing that this is so, "hold fast that which you now have"—cling tenaciously to your custom of confessing my name and acknowledging me alone as your Lord and your God, for even a single lapse in loyalty would cause you to lose your crown. The temptation, in one form or another, is perennial; consequently the man who never lets up, who "overcomes" continuously, is the only kind of man who has a right to wear the victor's wreath.

To hold that Christ is talking about heaven in this connec-

tion is deplorable. It vitiates the whole purport of the letter. Christ is talking about the Christian's good fight of faith here in this present evil world. This is the place where man has to do his "overcoming". What will anyone ever have to overcome, once he is in heaven? But no man overcomes unless he has backbone. Christian character has adamant in it. It is more immovable than the columns of Karnak, or the Pillars of Hercules. "He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God". James and Peter and John, we are told, were esteemed to be pillars in the church—not after they had crossed the bourne whence no traveller returns, but while they were here. And they were pillars that could not be shaken. Peter, it is true, began to crumble a little at the base on one occasion, but Paul patched him up, and he never crumbled again. Sometimes some pillars need a little concreting, and sometimes they need a good deal, but no real pillar has ever had to be taken out of the temple of God. It is stalwart character that Christ is commending—not to the faithful Philadelphians merely, but to all men, everywhere, all the time. He is directing men how to build that structure of which the apostles and prophets constitute the firm foundation and of which He is Himself the chief corner stone—that classic edifice which, as Paul tells us, is growing "into a holy temple in the Lord". New pillars are being added to that temple every day. And once they are added, they are never taken down or removed. Good men die, of course, but death only fixes them unendingly in the edifice. The sublime thing about men who "die in the Lord" is that "their works do follow them". When Christ makes

a man a pillar in the temple of His God, He builds him into a structure that is to fill eternity and make it worth while. The particular angle, however, from which this thought is approached in this letter must not be lost sight of. It is from the angle of the "open door" for missionary enterprise. The Philadelphians, few in numbers though they were, and weak in resources, opposed by the pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency of the Gentile and the bitter enmity of the Jew, serenely accepted the conditions as divinely arranged, concluded at once that a door had been opened before them, and calmly said within themselves, "We will enter the door, and whether it mean honor or disgrace, success or failure, life or death, we will proclaim the message and leave the issue in the hand of Christ". In return Christ could say, and did say in effect, "If you continue to maintain this attitude and conviction and programme of action, which means that if you but hold fast to what you already have in the way of Christian character, I will make you a power in the earth, pillars fitted to uphold and adorn the cause of righteousness in the world, men that have to be reckoned with by the forces of iniquity to the end of time." Men who have been mortised into the temple of God fill their place in their day, but in addition to that they are built into a space which has to be filled before the workers that follow them can perfect the structure. "They shall go no more out". Character tells for time and for eternity.

But character is not static; it is never at a standstill; it is a living thing charged with energy; it grows, blossoms, becomes "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever"; it is a lens

through which everything that happens passes and is sanctified and made effective for good, to the glory of God. Hence, to every man who gets a new character by becoming regenerate, Christ says, "I will write upon him the name of my God". The heathen of that day thought of Zeus as sovereign, and held that he and whatever other gods there were became incarnate in the Emperor. Domitian had gone so far as to ordain that even during his lifetime his subjects should address him as "our Lord and God". The Emperors' names accordingly were inscribed on the temples to the intent that the Emperors should be worshipped. Think for a moment what it would mean to have one's conception of God circumscribed and summed up in the character of a Caligula, or a Claudius, or a Nero, or a Domitian! Why, just to hear their names pronounced, even after the lapse of nineteen centuries, is enough to open the fountains of contempt in any Christian soul. When Christ, however, writes the name of His God into the heart of a good man, He writes into that heart a conception of God which shall expand in fulness and richness and splendor as long as God exists. The name of God stands for what God is, and God is a Spirit, infinite eternal and unchangeable in His being, and in all His attributes and excellencies and perfections. It is a conception before which the human mind at its uttermost will continue to bow in humility and adoration, impelled instinctively to exclaim, without a pause, as the eternities roll, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out!" The man whose mind is not furnished with a true concep-

tion of God is of all men the most pitiable. This, when we stop to think of it, is one of the primary, elemental first-truths of human thought. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom" is the form it takes in Holy Writ, but no man can reverence Jehovah as He ought to be revered without some accurate knowledge of the kind of Being He is; without knowing that He is essentially and inherently holy, that He is unflinchingly and unswervingly just, that He is measurelessly merciful, and that He is possessed of a wisdom which is able to bring these apparently exclusive attributes into peaceful harmony in dealing with the chief of sinners. When Christ writes the name of His God into the Christian heart, He supplies it with the only true conception of God that men have ever had, with a conception, moreover, that grows as the man grows, and is to expand continuously through coming millenniums without end. Precisely what we need today, in the religious world, in order to offset our supercilious modernity, is just the name of Christ's God written into the souls of men. The man who thinks of God otherwise than Christ thinks of Him is working on a deficit.

To know the Author and Architect of all our being, that He is the God of love, the Father of lights, and a very present help in trouble, is blessedness indeed; but to be an efficient workman in His service one must also know something of His project for the universe. Christ accordingly agrees not only to favor His friends with a true estimate of the character and perfections of God, but to supply them as well with the blue-prints of His plans. On every one of them, He says, I will write "the name of the city of my God,

the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God". A city, in the primitive meaning of the term, was a collection of human beings, living together in some suitable locality, and organized into a corporate community, with a view to the realization of some ideal, or set of ideals, that would be to the credit and comfort of all concerned. We must think of the holy city, the new Jerusalem, therefore, as being a municipality, wide as the world, actuated by common interests and common ends and aims, composed of a body of men each of whom pursues his separate course, yet never with the thought of meeting his own requirements merely, but equally with the thought of helping all others to obtain a like result, a harmonius social order of twice-born men, in whose minds nothing can be excellent unless it serves to quicken some poor unsaved fellow mortal to grasp and appropriate that rapturous ideal of human life that comes down out of heaven from God. But are we not coming thus to the very essence of the missionary spirit in its limpid simplicity? What does a genuine missionary actually do? Let us cross the seas to West Africa. Here are men in myriads who live under the spell of witchcraft and demonology, and whose crude conceptions of God, of religion and ethics, of the family, of the state, of territorial relationships, of everything in fact that pertains to the upper levels of life, leave them without a single worthy ideal for the human race. At bottom, however, their hearts have been fashioned just like ours. They have their sicknesses and sorrows and woes precisely as others do. At length the messenger of Christ arrives. He surveys their wretchedness. He burrows beneath their supersti-

tions. Here and there, buried deep and stained with guilt, he finds the broken fragments of the image in which they were created. He brings to them the love of Christ. Their hearts respond, and instantly before their opened eyes life and immortality come to light. What has happened? Why, these new-born men have caught a glimpse of the plan of God for humanity. They begin to see the things of eternity as Abraham saw them, and Isaiah, and Daniel. They stand with Moses and Elijah on the mount and gaze into the face of the transfigured Christ. In Him they see the possibility and the promise of binding all mankind into one vast, loving, sympathetic municipality, described in Scripture as "the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God". In the language of the letter, Christ has written the name of the city of His God into their lives. Also, at the same time, He has written the same name anew into the lives of the messengers who gained the converts. Within the radius of their own experience they have actually seen the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God and becoming localized in the hearts of those to whom they proclaimed the message. Their successes justify their faith and lead them on to a larger hope. The coming centuries throb wide with possibilities, and they realize that it is not in vain that they have been taught to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven". We do not have to go to heaven to enter the New Jerusalem; God lowers it to earth; we can live in it here; apart from the figure, it is God's ideal mode of existence for the human race.

A good character, ever growing better; a true conception

of God, unceasingly expanding; an intelligent grasp of the end and aim of history, strengthened continually by new accretions to the kingdom of God—is that all? By no means. Christ, remember, is addressing the Philadelphians, who were Christians to begin with. Indeed, the force of the letter lies in the fact that they were eminent Christians. Gentile scorn, Jewish malice, numerical weakness—nothing, in fact, could hold them back from proclaiming Christ. If they would press on in this way, He would give them enlarged conceptions of His heavenly Father, and of His Father's plans and ideals for humankind, but in addition to that, He would give them enlarged conceptions of Himself, and of the place allotted to His work in the salvation of men. Of the man who "overcomes" Christ says, " I will write upon him my own new name". At one time Philadelphia had received the new name of Neo-Caesarea, at another the new name of Flavia. These new names, however, were "new" in the sense that they were different names. But Christ uses another word in speaking of the "new name" which He proposes to write upon His own friends. This second word requires us to think of the name always as the same ever blessed name; it is "new" only because of its new significance. When the Christian toiler in West Africa, for example, brings a native to the feet of Jesus, he realizes afresh, and as he never did before, what the name of Christ can do. It breaks upon him overwhelmingly that apart from Christ he could have accomplished absolutely nothing. He drops his plummet a few fathoms deeper into that fathomless statement made to Thomas—"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man

cometh unto the Father, but by me". In all that pertains to the betterment of the human race the name of Jesus Christ is the name that is above every name.

"Worthiest art thou at all times to be sung
With undefiled tongue,
Son of our God, Giver of life alone,
Therefore, in all the world, thy glories, Lord, we own".

At the end of this letter stands the same exhortation we have met with in all the others, but has it not in this connection obtained from its setting an added touch of meaning of deepest import? Philadelphia's characteristic feature, as we have seen, was its genuine missionary spirit—a spirit which holds within itself, germinally, or in perspective, the whole thought of God for the redemption of fallen men. This spirit the Christians of Philadelphia allowed nothing to crush. Under its dominance they counted no costs, made no excuses, faced seemingly infinite odds, never wavered, never hesitated, and made good. In the light of such a circumstance can we not hear the Holy Spirit saying to any church, or congregation, however small, however weak, however handicapped, if only it has the holy zeal of Philadelphia, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"?

CHAPTER XV

PREFATORY TO LECTURE VIII

THE Laodicean Church had been in existence for upward of forty years, for Paul makes mention of it in his Epistle to the Colossians (Col. 4:16). The exceptional beauty of the natural surroundings and how the city provided for the comfort of its citizens will be dealt with at length in the Lecture that follows. If Archippus was the pastor of this Church, as some have conjectured, it would be legitimate to conclude, from Col. 4:17, that the lives of the Laodicean Christians, even at that early period, were not altogether what they ought to have been. Evidently Archippus, wherever his work was, had a task on his hands. The situation of Laodicea, says Charles, "fitted it to become a great commercial and administrative city. Besides being a seat of the Cibyratic *conventus*, it was (1) a banking centre (thus Cicero proposes to cash there his treasury bills of exchange—*Ad Fam.* iii. 5, *Ad Att.* v. 15), and very opulent; for when it was overthrown by the great earthquakes of 60–61 A.D. (Tac. *Ann.* xiv. 27) it was not obliged to apply for an imperial subsidy as was usual in the case of other cities of Asia Minor. . . . It was also (2) a large manufacturer of clothing and carpets of the native black wool, and it was likewise (3) the seat of a flourishing medical school, amongst its teachers having been Zeuxis and Alexander Philalethes".

14. The word "Amen", at the end of a prayer, is a declaration made in the presence of the omniscient God,

and of all others who may have heard the petitions, that the suppliant is pellucidly sincere. A "faithful and true witness" is a witness who, when the moment comes to take the stand, will testify to the truth in its ultimate realities whomsoever it may affect. The insincerities of the hypocrite were the outstanding characteristic of the Laodicean Church. And now He whose life is the very negation of insincerity takes the stand to tell an unspeakably unpleasant truth about a congregation of hypocrites. Surely, in such circumstances, the two opening epithets are infinitely apt. But so is the third. Of all men in the world the hypocrite has to start in the new. Christ therefore is here announced, or rather announces Himself, as the One who "begins" God's new "creation" in the soul. He is the hypocrite's only hope. Though the hypocrite has been living on the pretension that he *has* come to Christ, he has *not* come to Christ. What a tremendous step the hypocrite has to take to be saved! He has to come back to the feet of the Christ whom he has been making it a pastime to crucify every moment since he came to be a hypocrite. In the words of the epithet, he has to come back to "the beginning of the creation of God". He has to start all over again. The view that the epithets with which these letters open were tacked on at a later date or by a different hand, as a sort of afterthought, is ludicrous. In every instance the epithet and the letter to which it is attached are, as we might say, congenital. The interrelationships are too intimate and subtle and far-reaching to have originated anywhere but in the mind of Christ, who in every case, we must remember, is Himself the speaker.

15, 16. Laodicea's "contract" lay in the fact that it was neither ψυχρός (**cold**) nor ζεστός (**hot**), but χλιαρός (**lukewarm**). In point of temperature, of course, tepid water is midway between hot and cold. But when it comes to taking it into the mouth for drinking purposes, as it is evidently thought of here, the case is different. One loves cold water, and can drink hot water, but "lukewarm" water is nauseating. So it was with the Church of Laodicea. Charles: "The Laodiceans are not only denounced, but denounced with the utmost abhorrence. Such a denunciation is without parallel in the other Epistles". So also Alford, commenting on the significance of the word "cold": "We must take it as meaning, not only entirely without the spark of spiritual life, but also and chiefly, by consequence, openly belonging to the world without, and having no part nor lot in Christ's church, and actively opposed to it. This, as well as the opposite state of spiritual fervor, would be an intelligible and plainly-marked condition: at all events, free from that danger of mixed motive and disregarded principle which belongs to the lukewarm state: inasmuch as a man in earnest, be he right or wrong, is ever a better man than one professing what he does not feel". Trench: "How shall we then understand this exclamation, '*I would that thou wert cold or hot*'? Best, I think, in this way, namely, by regarding the '*cold*' here as one hitherto untouched by the powers of grace. There is always hope of such an one, that, when he does come under those powers, he may become a zealous and earnest Christian. He is not one on whom the grand experiment of the Gospel has been tried and has failed. But the '*lukewarm*' is one who

has tasted of the good gift and of the powers of the world to come, who has been a subject of Divine grace, but in whom that grace has failed to kindle more than the feeblest spark. The publicans and harlots were '*cold*' the Apostles '*hot*'. The Scribes and Pharisees . . . were '*lukewarm*'."

In reality, therefore, as these and other writers set forth, one who is 'lukewarm' is in a worse condition by far than one who is 'cold'. The 'lukewarm' and the 'cold' are equally "without a spark of spiritual life"; neither of them has any "part or lot" in it, since they belong, one 'openly', the other secretly, to "the world without"; but the 'cold' still has enough honesty to admit the fact and sail under his own colors, whereas the 'lukewarm' has no use for integrity except as an implement of temporal success. Thus the 'lukewarm' Laodiceans were like the scribes and Pharisees; a body of false pretenders, who "shut up the kingdom of heaven against men"; who, when they made a convert, made him "twofold more the child of hell than themselves"; who were careful to strain out "the gnat", but thought nothing of swallowing "the camel"; who made it a point "to appear beautiful outward", while "within" they were "full of hypocrisy and iniquity"; who, though they "garnished the sepulchres of the righteous", were in reality but "serpents", a "generation of vipers", whose "house", unless they should repent, would be 'left unto them desolate' (Matt. 23:13–39). Is it any wonder that Christ says of such a Church, "I am on the point of spewing you out of my mouth"?

17. In this verse the foregoing view is established—

established, it seems to me, beyond a question. The Laodicean said, "I am rich"—that is, rich toward God, spiritually rich; and I have nobody to thank but myself, for by my own hand "I have made my riches", and am, as I have a right to, enjoying them now, "and not a need do I have". Of the Laodicean we might almost say, "How unsearchable was his egotism, and his hypocrisy past finding out!" Christ calls him "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind naked". How could it be possible to be worse off than that? These terms are enlarged upon in the Lecture. Alford: "From the whole context it is evident that not outward wordly wealth, but imagined spiritual riches, are in question". The unusual pronoun σύ (thou), and the presence of the article, whose occurrence with the *first* redoubles the force of *all the five* adjectives, ought to be noted. Swete: "Σύ is emphatic, 'thou that boastest', and the article that precedes the predicates (cf. Blass, *Gr.* p. 157) strengthens the picture: 'it is thou that art the (conspicuously, pre-eminently) wretched' etc". Here, almost unbidden, the twelfth chapter of Hosea comes into mind—"Ephraim feedeth on wind" (v. 1); "Ephraim said, Surely I am become rich, I have found me wealth: in all my labors they shall find in me no iniquity that were sin" (v. 8). So it is always with the man who thinks that he has "need of nothing", spiritually.

18. Trench is perhaps correct in saying that "there is a slight touch of irony, but the irony of divine love, in the words" of this verse. It is difficult for a real thinker to talk with a man who thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think without a shade of irony. We must remem-

ber, however, that what others can do with difficulty Christ can do outright. The irony here, if there is any, lies imbedded in the nature of the case. Christ's purpose is clean and whole. To my mind it is but another instance of *Paul's* custom of becoming all things to all men. Hypocrites are very touchy. To win them one must approach them with great precaution. In addressing such the mildest term would be the strongest—that is, the most apt to reach them. In συμβουλεύω σοι (**I counsel you**), therefore, I am inclined to see an exhibition of urbanity, delicacy, divine propriety. Of course, even to "counsel" a man who is convinced that he has "need of nothing", not even of counsel, is a precarious undertaking. But counselling is the one method above all others that would be likely to meet with the least resistance. And the Laodicean Church seems to have listened to Christ's counsel, and to His pleading (v. 20), for it continued, and seems to have flourished, for centuries. Specially to be noted, in connection with the third member of the opening epithet, is παρ' ἐμοῦ (**from me**), from me *as a Friend*, for there is always an element of good will lying latent in παρά,—from me, the Friend who stands at your door and knocks, from me, "the beginning of God's new creation" in the soul, from me, back to whom you will have to come unreservedly, if you ever mean to make even so much as a start on the road to life and immortality. Come to me and buy of me, says Christ, (1) χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρός (**gold that has been purified by fire**)—character fresh from the crucible of the crucifixion, for, as Alford says, "The ἐκ gives the sense of being just fresh from the burning or smelting, and thus

not only tried by the process, but bright and new from the furnace"—ἵνα πλουτήσῃς (**that you may come to be**)—what at present you are not, namely,—*rich*, that is, of course, toward God; (2) ἱμάτια λευκά (**white garments**)—Alford says that Düsterdieck "rightly remarks that the white garments are distinct from the gold only in constituting a different image in the form of expression, not really in the thing signified". But is there not, after all, an advance in the thought? Surely sterling character clothes itself in a splendidly potent influence for good in the world. Moreover, it is an influence that will be in no danger of "exposing" its owner when the testing time comes. There will be nothing to fear from any 'shame of nakedness', for Christian character has no nakedness. Its white garments are a part of it. Through them it 'manifests' itself, even as through ragged garments nakedness is seen. "Gold" and "garments" are like fire and light; in one sense they are the same; still, they are different, and we make the distinction; (3) κολλούριον (**collyrium**), a sort of eye-opening ointment or powder that will enable one to see things as they are—to see the immaculate God as He is, and the human heart as it is. Trench: "The beginning of all true amendment is to see ourselves as indeed we are, in our misery, our guilt, our shame. . . . The Spirit convinces of sin, and by this '*eyesalve*' we must understand the illuminating grace of the Holy Ghost, which at once shows to us God, and in God and in His light ourselves. And if the eyesalves of antiquity commonly caused the eye to smart on their first application, . . . this will only set forth the more fitly to us the wholesome pain and medicinal smart which

belong to the spiritual eyesalve as well; making for us discoveries so painful as it does, causing us to see in ourselves a nakedness and poverty which had been wholly concealed from us before; while yet only through the seeing and confessing of this can that poverty ever be exchanged for riches, or that nakedness for 'durable clothing'."

19. The subject is emphatic—ἐγώ (**as for myself,** in distinction from all others, **I**). In fact, the clause is singularly strong throughout. Note especially ἐὰν φιλῶ (**if in any case I still continue to retain a feeling of compassionate affection**); then the rest—as many as I have it for, I reprove with a view to convicting them of their sins, and of bringing them under discipline. The difference between φιλῶ and ἀγαπῶ is not one of intensity; in the mouth of Christ each is infinitely intense. The real distinction lies in the fact that ἀγαπῶ discriminates, whereas φιλῶ does not. To the Philadelphians (v. 9) Christ says ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε (**it is you**) as distinguished from the Jews, as such, (**that I loved**). Moreover, He loved them with a love that was always sitting in judgment on the battle that was going on in their souls between right and wrong. But the Laodiceans were all of one kind; in their souls there was no battle to be watched; the "new man" was not present; the "old man" had everything his own way; they were all unregenerate, and, of course, equally so; there was no discrimination to be made. The word to be used, therefore, was φιλῶ. Cf. John 16:27, where Christ, speaking to His genuine friends, tells them that the Father φιλεῖ (**loves**) them; with regard to those who are in Christ Jesus the Father has no discriminations to make. In Christ all are one (John

17:22). As long as Christ had enough compassion for the Laodiceans to prompt Him to "reprove" them, and to keep Him standing at their door and knocking, there was some hope for them. In the second clause the choice of the present and aorist imperatives is full of significance—Get yourselves into the continuous habit of being zealous, that is to say, of being Christians; and to this end change your entire spiritual attitude radically, once for all. Charles: "Here zeal is enjoined as a permanent element in the Christian character—hence ζήλευε and not ζήλευσον, while repentance is required as a definite change once and for all from their present condition—hence μετανόησον."

20. This verse vibrates with infinite love. God bows the heavens and comes down, so to speak, in the person of His Son, and virtually takes the position of a Lazarus at the rich man's gate, where He pleads with the rich man to open the door, and take Him in, and let Him have a seat at his table. In this verse Laodicea's "contract"—to show how great God's love for fallen man is—is disclosed in its fullest import. As long as Christ continues to hold the Laodicean Church aloft in His right hand, how can anyone presume to doubt the depths to which His love will stoop? Note the language: Look! **I have already taken my stand** at the door (ἕστηκα is perfect), and **am even now knocking** (κρούω is present). The "Behold I stand at the door and knock", says Meyer, "is essentially nothing else than the ἔρχομαι ταχύ (**I come quickly**), or ἥξω (**I will come**) with its paracletic applications". One thing further should be noted here with care. For the moment, the Laodicean Church as a body is dropped out of

mind and the appeal is made to each member individually ἐάν τις (**if,** under any circumstances, **anyone whatsoever**) should hear and respond! "Hence with De Wette, Alford, Weiss, and others this verse", says Charles, "is to be interpreted as referring to repentance in the present".

21. This in a sense is the most glorious promise of all. In a word, it is an assurance that the victor shall be granted the privilege of sharing in the divine sovereignty. Nor is there the semblance of a reason why this participation should be postponed for so much as a single hour after the sinner has made his peace with God through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as his Saviour. It is a blunder to interpret figurative language literally. Who would care to sit on a throne for more than ten minutes, either in this life or the life to come? Christ in this letter, as in all the others, is talking about what happens *in the soul,* in that region of man's consciousness where moral victories are won and real blessedness is enjoyed. Alford therefore, and those for whom he speaks, are wholly wrong in maintaining that "such promises cannot be regarded, as this by some, as partially fulfilled in this life", but must be referred solely to "the blessed life of glory hereafter". There will be no "blessed life of glory hereafter" that is not begun here. And it will be the same in kind here as hereafter—and in quantity too, for that matter, if capacity is taken into account. That is why Christ "reproves and disciplines" (v. 19), first that He may create, and second that He may enlarge, our capacities. Every Christian, now and here, in his life in the flesh, sits μετά (**in alliance with**) Christ ἐν (**in the exercise of**) His sovereignty, even as Christ sits

in alliance with the Father in the exercise of the Father's sovereignty. "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30); "Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (John 17:21 R.V.). To be one with God, in Christ, now, is to be a sovereign, now.

Alford makes another remark on this verse which is well worthy of consideration: "Doubtless the occurrence of this, the highest and most glorious of all the promises, in this place, is to be explained not entirely from any special aptness to the circumstances of the Laodicean Church, . . . but also from the fact of its occurring at the end of all the Epistles, and as it were gathering them all into one". In a word, the sevenfold blessedness of the Christian life, set before us in the promises contained in these seven letters, reaches its consummation in the rapturous assurance that it is the privilege, the duty and the distinction of all the friends of our glorious Lord day by day to "live and reign" with Him.

AN EXPLANATORY TRANSLATION

And to the Church of Laodicea—the Church that has turned away from me completely—write: These things says the Amen, whose crystalline sincerity can not be questioned, the Faithful and True Witness, who, when He takes the stand, will not shade a single fact nor allow it to be wrested from its real significance, the One who begins all the creative work of God, and to whom, accordingly, if entrance into life is ever to be found, all flesh must come. I know the contract allotted to you, since you are neither cold—as those who have never heard the Gospel, nor hot—

as those who have sincerely accepted me as their Saviour. O that you were either of the number who have never heard the Gospel, or else of the number who have heard and believed! As it is, you are worse off than if you had never known the truth. Like lukewarm water you are actually nauseating. And so, because you are lukewarm, posing as saints when in reality you are nothing but whited sepulchres, and are therefore neither Christians nor pagans, I am on the point of spewing you, once for all, out of my mouth. What evidence do I have? Why, you say of yourselves spiritually what the Laodicean citizens say of themselves concerning material things; you say, "I am rich, and I have no one to thank but myself, for by my own hand I have gained what I have; indeed, I am so rich in spirit that I have no needs whatsoever". And yet, while you say this in your heart, you are, without knowing it, wretched, and pitiable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me, your discarded Friend, genuine, drossless, golden character, fresh from the fire, that you may come into the possession of the true riches; to buy from me the white garments also that will be in keeping with such a character, to the end that you may put off those ragged garments of your own designing, which you are wearing now, and which but serve to render the utter nakedness of your soul the more conspicuous; and lastly to buy of me that ointment that will open the eyes of your heart wide enough to let you see how blind you are. I, for my part, as long as I have a spark of compassion left, as many as I have it for, I reason with and reprove and subject to discipline. Behold, I have already taken my

stand at the door, and am even now knocking in the hope of gaining an entrance to your heart. If by any hap any one at all should hear my voice and open the door, I will enter his soul and dine with him and he with me. He who overcomes in such a desperate case as this, and lives down his insincerities by daily godliness—to such a one I will grant the privilege of sitting down in alliance with me on my throne of universal empire, even as I overcame once for all and sat down once for all with my Father on His throne.

HE THAT HATH AN EAR LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH TO THE CHURCHES.

Chapter Three, verses 14–22.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LETTER TO LAODICEA

A Message Concerning the Poor Rich Church that has need of Nothing

THE Lycus valley in its palmiest days must have been surpassingly beautiful. Right through the centre of Colossae and on past Laodicea and Hierapolis flowed the crooked little river to join the crookeder Maeander. At Colossae, in those days, the Lycus, we are told, plunged into a tunnel and made its way underground for fully half a mile, which of itself was enough to make the river notable. Then, too, the lateral streams, which contribute to the waters of the Lycus, deposit minerals in their course and adorn the valley with some of the most remarkable formations in the world. "These incrustations", says Lightfoot, "spread like a stony shroud over the ground. Gleaming like glaciers on the hill-side they attract the eye of the traveller at a distance of twenty miles, and form a singularly striking feature in scenery of more than common beauty and impressiveness". Laodicea nestled on a pleasant platform looking northward from a southern range of mountains, about ten miles or so from the point where the Lycus reaches the Maeander. Behind it in the distance stood the snow-capped Cadmus. On either side of it, from this mountain system, a smaller river bounded down to meet the Lycus, so that Laodicea, as we might say, presented the appearance of a city lowered

from the mountains and caught in a pocket made of rivers. Out in front of it again, across the Lycus, about six miles away, stood Hierapolis, the Holy City, as its name suggests, the city of temples. "In no place known to the ancients", says Chandler, "was the power of nature more strikingly revealed. The waters of almost all the streams in the Lycus valley deposit limestone; but the splendid hot springs of Hierapolis exceed all the rest in this quality. If a tiny jet of water is made to flow in any direction, it soon constructs for itself a channel of stone. The precipices immediately south of the city",—and consequently facing Laodicea,—"about a hundred feet or more in height, over which the water tumbles in numerous little streams, have become an immense frozen cascade, the surface wavy, as of water in its headlong course suddenly petrified". Sir Charles Fellows is equally enthusiastic in his description. "My attention", he says, "had been attracted at twenty miles' distance by the singular aspect of its hill, upon which there appeared to be perfectly white streams poured down its sides; and this peculiarity may have been the attraction which first led to the city being built there. The waters which rise in copious streams from several deep springs among the ruins are also to be found in small rivulets for twenty miles around; they are tepid and to appearance perfectly pure. . . . The town stands upon the high cliff over which these streams fall in cascades; it commands a fine view of the valley and has many of the picturesque advantages which would be sought in a modern watering-place; the mountains rise at the back, and the wooded ravines offer shade for summer rambles". To this we

must add what Lightfoot has to say. "It is at Hierapolis", says this great scholar, "that the remarkable physical features which distinguish the valley of the Lycus display themselves in the fullest perfection. Over the steep cliffs which support the plateau of the city, tumble cascades of pure white stone, the deposit of calcareous matter from the streams which, after traversing this upper level, are precipitated over the ledge into the plain beneath and assume the most fantastic shapes in their descent. At one time overhanging in cornices fringed with stalactites, at another hollowed out into basins or broken up with ridges, they mark the site of the city at a distance, glistening on the mountainside like foaming cataracts frozen in the fall". He further says that "the streams to which the scenery owes the remarkable features already described are endowed with valuable medicinal qualities, while at the same time they are so copious that the ancient city is described as full of self-made baths", and that "to this fashionable watering-place, thus favored by nature, seekers of pleasure and seekers of health alike were drawn".

But this letter, you may feel like saying, was written to Laodicea; why then dwell so long on the attractions of Hierapolis? Well, for the simple reason that if the inhabitants of Hierapolis ever wanted really to know how fair and fascinating their city was, they would have to go to Laodicea to find it out. Doubtless one of the decisive arguments in locating Laodicea was the very fact that it would thus command a telling view of that frozen Niagara, over the brink of which Hierapolis, as its buildings rose and multiplied, seemed but to be awaiting the proper

moment to plunge to the plains below. The Laodiceans were in position to say to the Hierapolitans, "Come over and see us once in a while, and we will show you your city".

Laodicea, then, was beautiful for situation; it had "need of nothing" in that regard. But it was wealthy too. To get the force of that sentence in the letter—"I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing"—one would need rather to put it this way: "I am rich, and I have made my own money, and have need of nothing". The statement has a certain ring of independence in it. It has more than that—it has a touch of swaggering, an air of insolence, a tang of arrogance. Laodicea wanted the world to understand that it was no pauper. Had it not made itself famous in the eyes of all the world by declining the bounty of Nero after the earthquake? It was a banking centre, for there it was that Cicero proposed to cash his treasury bills of exchange. It was a city of commerce, for at Laodicea three great highways met. It must have had its own manufacturing plants, for the Laodicean valley was illustrious for its sheep with their fine luxuriant fleeces of glossy raven-black wool, and the fabrics made of this material bore the city's mark. It was noted also for its skill in making and dyeing garments of a daintier sort; indeed, so exquisite in texture and rich in color were they that to see them was to be dissatisfied until the seer owned them. Laodicea was the Paris of its day. It set the fashions for fine apparel as far as its name was known. And so again, in this respect, it felt that it had "need of nothing".

Furthermore, it was a pleasure resort for the well and

prosperous, and a sanatorium for the sick. The arena of its stadium, which appears to have been rounded out into a Roman amphitheatre to accommodate the crowds, and which it took the city twelve years to build, was nine hundred feet long, and from the ruins of the structure we may judge that it was in keeping with the city's wealth. The Leviathan could have anchored in its basin. Nor was the city without its theatres. It had two, or perhaps three, of them. The one that faced the east had seats of polished marble, the bases of which were carved in the form of lion's feet. One of them bears the name of Zenon, a member of a family of millionaires, who divided their time and their millions between Smyrna and Laodicea, and whose princely donations had no small part to do in making these two cities the nonpareils of Asia Minor. And of course, since it was a Greek city, it had its gymnasium, an elaborate establishment with its porticoes and courts and chambers and baths, embellished with works of art, and with its libraries and reading-rooms for the development of the mind—a school, a university in fact, for the discipline and training of the body and the enrichment of the intellect, so that every citizen might be equipped, as Odysseus once said to the Phaeacians, with "a fine physique, a goodly mind, and elegance in speech". Another building, not to be overlooked, especially in connection with the city's cultural advantages, was its odeum, where the musicians could assemble to hear the masterpieces of their day. And finally, to these utilities—for in no other light could a Greek regard them—was added a most remarkable water system, by which, through an aqueduct made of stone, and

with no common skill, the pure medicinal waters of some distant lake among the hills or mountains were conveyed to a reservoir that stood on practically the same level with the city, thus supplying the city effectively without subjecting it to the danger of an undue pressure on the pipes. One can hardly imagine what more the citizens of Laodicea could have done, in a material way, to make their city inviting and attractive.

All this, however, was for the well and prosperous; but how about the sick? To begin with, it was something, of course, and no small thing either, that the city was supplied with flowing streams of good cool medicinal water to drink. It was an invaluable asset as well that the hot springs of the neighborhood furnished an abundance of equally medicinal water for the baths. But Laodicea was not limited to these advantages. It was the home of physicians, the notable seat of a school of medicine, which flourished in connection with the temple of Aesculapius, the heathen's substitute for the "Great Physician". These physicians may have discovered and manufactured, at all events they certainly used, a particularly effective preparation for the eyes—a circumstance which in that country was in itself enough to make them popular, if not illustrious. And it would also in all probability be well within the facts to say that as general practitioners the physicians of Laodicea were second to none in their day. From almost every angle one could think of, therefore, the citizens of Laodicea could easily persuade themselves that their city was so much better than any other city in the world that they really had "need of nothing".

Of course, the list of the city's claims to superiority and excellence would be incomplete without at least a passing reference to its temples. How many it had we do not know. But judging from the number of temples in adjacent cities, where the ruins tell the story plainly, we may be sure it had a plenty.

Really, then, the citizens of Laodicea must have been a pretty happy people. John could have said to them what Paul said to the Athenians on Mar's Hill—Ye men of Laodicea, "in all things I perceive that ye are very religious". They were "godly", in their sense of the term, and we are told on good authority that "godliness with contentment is great gain". They had their views of religion; they were prosperous; they were satisfied. When they looked about them at their comforts and surroundings, what more could they ask? When they directed their eyes toward the inward horizon of life, they were equally at ease. Had they not made ample provisions for the intellect, and the heart, and conscience? The essential thing to be grasped in this connection is that Laodicea was an instance of what we speak of as a "state of mind". The outstanding thing about it was its unruffled self-complacency. It "had need of nothing".

Now the trouble with the Laodicean Church was that it had imbibed the city's spirit, and had come to possess the city's "state of mind". One great truth taught in all these letters is that every man's life is intimately linked with the city or community in which he lives. No man can escape the inroads of his environment. He may yield or he may refuse to yield, but in either case the environment

will leave its marks. In the present case it took the Church in and down. No doubt the members of the Church shared in the general wealth and prosperity of the city. No doubt some of them, the women in particular perhaps, appeared in public, or came to church, dressed in garments made from some of Laodicea's choicest fabrics. No doubt those that had illnesses had often applied to the physicians at the temple of Aesculapius for medical aid, and had had their ailments cured. In these respects there was no room for criticism. To be wealthy is not to be ungodly any more than to be a pauper is to be a saint. A man's bank account is not his character. It may have a great deal to do with his character, and his character may have a great deal to do with it, but we cannot judge the one from the other. Joseph of Aramathea was rich. And so it is also in the matter of dress. It is not necessary that sanctity should adorn itself in garments out of style. When Christians appear in public in such a way as to make their neighbors fear that they are going to elope with a scarecrow, they are not commending their religion. It is true that "the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment", but it is also true that meat is needed to support life, and that raiment, cut to the fashion of the times, helps to make life happier. There is no piety in looking like an antique. And even in medicine, there are some arguments for going to the physician that can help you, no matter to what school he may happen to belong. It was not that the Church shared with the city in taking pleasure in its outward prosperity; not that at all; that was to be expected; it would have been churlish, it would have been out of

keeping with the spirit of Christianity, not to do that. No, it was this rather—the members of the Laodicean Church had allowed themselves to become wholly satisfied with their present spiritual state. They said within themselves, "We have accepted Christianity, and we have become so thoroughly rounded out in our Christian life and experience that we have need of nothing. We have the true riches; we have clothed ourselves becomingly; we can see things, and understand and comprehend them, as well as there is any need for." As a result of this state of mind they were totally indifferent toward anything that would make for progress. Why should they make any effort to grow in grace if they had already reached the limits of growth? Why should they agonize to enter in at the strait gate if they had already entered, and the gate was shut? And why, if they were already sure of heaven, should they discommode themselves, or endanger their peace and comfort and good relationships and prosperity, by trying to foist their religion on their friends and neighbors, when their friends and neighbors were likely better satisfied with what they had than they would be with what they got in case they got it? The Church was there; there was preaching every Sabbath; they could come if they cared to; they would be welcome should they come; the door was always open; it was their own concern; why worry? This was the atmosphere in which the Laodicean Church was living. This was the air that it was breathing. This was the attitude that it assumed itself. And it is an attitude, which, when it has once gained an entrance, deals a deathblow to every noble sentiment of the human soul.

To a genuine Christian self-complacency is abhorrent. Paul was a typical Christian, and we have statements of his that exemplify the exact situation which confronts us here. If Paul had been living in Laodicea, how easy it would have been for him to say, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therein to be content". Had he been visited there by a delegation of citizens sent to inquire about his accommodations and comfort and physical welfare, one can imagine that he could have entered into the spirit of the city so far as to say, "Gentlemen, I perceive that you are citizens of no mean city; your arrangements are ideal; this old body of mine has never been better cared for; I can think of nothing you could do to make my stay more enjoyable; no, gentlemen, I thank you, but really I have need of nothing". Paul could have said as much as that. But suppose that this delegation had been composed of members of the Laodicean Church, and that it had been sent to ask Paul to unveil his soul and let its deepest motions and presentiments be seen, what would have been the outcome? Would we not have had such things as these from his aged lips? "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this

grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ". "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me". "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief". Is there any self-complacency in that? Think of Paul, "the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times", the man who had been scourged, and beaten with rods, and stoned, and shipwrecked, and had passed through perils of all sorts and in all kinds of places, and had suffered weariness and painfulness and hunger and thirst, and had carried as a daily burden for many years "the care of all the churches", and who was always forgetting the things that were behind, and pressing on to the things that were before, and was doing it all because of his love for Christ—think of that man crying out in agony of spirit, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this dead body of sin!" Think of him living that magnificent life of his and yet trembling every hour lest he himself might be a castaway! And then think of those worthless self-satisfied Laodiceans saying within themselves, and publishing it by every look and turn and gesture, "We have need of nothing"!

This brings us logically face to face with the wording of the letter. And if there is any letter in the seven that needs to be studied carefully, it is this one. How unmercifully

that word "lukewarm" has been abused. How common it is to speak of a "lukewarm Christian". But if a person is a Christian, he is not lukewarm; and conversely, if he is lukewarm, in the sense in which the word is used in this letter, he is not a Christian. This letter looks upon a "lukewarm Christian" as a contradiction in terms, as an impossibility. If a man is spiritually wretched and pitiable, and a cowering pauper and blind and naked, and does not know it, there is something radically wrong with him. He is not a Christian. The adjective here rendered "wretched" occurs in but one other place in the New Testament, and when the two passages are brought together, it throws a flood of light on both. "O wretched man that I am!", cries Paul. He saw sin still lurking in his soul, and he knew that sin in his soul was just as black as it was in any one else's soul, and seeing the awful thing there he sought its remission "through Jesus Christ our Lord". The Laodiceans were "wretched", and from precisely the same cause, but they were not conscious of it; they knew not that they were wretched, the letter says. The thing that made Paul quiver in very agony of soul never affected their calm nerves, although they had a millionfold more of it than he had. Instead therefore of crying out, "O wretched men that we are! who shall deliver us?" they looked about them with an air of insolence, and said, "We have need of nothing". They were not Christians. The next adjective is equally instructive. It too occurs but twice. Some at Corinth had denied that Christ rose from the dead. If this be true, says Paul, "we are of all men the most pitiable". "Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have per-

ished", he says. They are lost. So also it was with the Laodiceans. They were miserable, or pitiable—in need, that is to say, of the kind of compassion that would "act" for their salvation. They were lost, and unconcerned. Accordingly, they went about flattering themselves with the ghastly solace that they "had need of nothing". But the word that follows is even more suggestive. It brings up the picture of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Laodiceans regarded themselves as rich—rich toward God, that is, but they were as "poor" spiritually as Lazarus was financially; or better still, they were as poor as the Rich Man found himself to be after he died. They were heading for torment. Furthermore, like the Pharisees, they were "blind". It would be impossible to find a better exposition of this word than the one Christ Himself supplies us with in connection with the man born blind, for in this case He not only performs the miracle, but expounds its import. "And Jesus said, For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth". If these Laodiceans, like the man who had been blind from his birth, had been willing to admit that they were blind, there would have been some hope for them. But they knew not that they were blind; they kept protesting that they could see; therefore their sin still stood against them unforgiven. Nor is the last word in the list that Christ uses here to be lightly overlooked. Keep in

mind that the Laodiceans were professing to be what they were not, and then turn to that similar circumstance as it stands recorded in the nineteenth chapter of Acts, where "certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth". Among these were Sceva's sons. But when they undertook, under the assumed credentials of Jesus and Paul, to do what in itself was a good work, "the man in whom the evil spirit was", we are told, "leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded". And so it always is with hypocrites. Even the powers of darkness despise a hypocrite. "Jesus we know and Paul we know, but who are ye?" is what they say. These sons of Sceva were nothing but fakirs. And when they put forth a pretense at doing something good and commendable, they were "shown up", they were "exposed", and that, too, by their own kind. Even Satan spewed them out of his mouth. Singular too—is it not—that the Prince of hypocrites could not abide his underling hypocrites, or was it because they botched the job? At all events, they were unmasked. And so it was and would be with the Laodiceans; they were "naked"; and though they knew it not at the time, sooner or later they would find it out. To sum it up in a sentence—they were "wretched", because in their hearts they were harboring sin with respect to which they were totally indifferent; "pitiable", because they were contented to live within a sphere in which the offer of salvation was not available; "poor", because they regarded

temporal prosperity and physical comfort as unmistakable indications of acceptance with God; "blind", because with all their knowledge and culture they were unable to perceive their lost condition; and "naked", because their hollow hypocrisy was so inherently abhorrent that even their own kind would eventually expose them. Christ in these letters is dealing with things in their ultimate essence. When He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot", His meaning is like this—"I know the aspect of truth which your condition exemplifies, you are neither pagans nor Christians, you are worse than pagans and yet you pretend to be better than Christians, you carry the heart of the one and the name of the other; I wish that you were either pagans out and out, both in heart and in name, or else Christians out and out, both in name and in reality. As you are, you are hypocrites, and 'the hypocrite's hope shall perish', he is of all men the most pitiable".

"Of all men the most pitiable"—that expression, in its bearing on the Laodicean character, has in it the very precision of science. A professing Christian who is a hypocrite does not stand midway between a pagan and a Christian; not at all; on the contrary, a pagan stands midway between a hypocrite and a Christian. The hypocrite's character is the Ultima Thule of iniquity. Beyond it it is humanly impossible to go. And the worst thing about it is that the hypocrite deceives himself. Paul uses the strongest word the Greek can furnish him with when he speaks of the man who thinks differently of himself than he ought to think. He says that "he deceiveth himself", but the verb he

employs means that the man deceives himself down in the innermost sanctuary of the soul; it means that the man defiles the Holy of holies within his own breast. Victor Hugo says, "There is a spectacle grander than the ocean, and that is the conscience. There is a spectacle grander than the sky, and it is the interior of the soul. . . . Let us take nothing away from the human mind. Suppression is evil. Certain faculties of man are directed towards the Unknown. The Unknown is an ocean. What is conscience? The compass of the Unknown". Ponder those searching sentences for a moment. What does the hypocrite do? This, and nothing but this,—he trifles with the compass. He professes to be heading for the haven which all men desire to see, but at what port will he arrive if he tampers with the needle? And more than that, if he keeps on increasing the deviation until he becomes unconscious that he is doing it, what then? When he abuses that within his own bosom that is grander than the ocean and grander than the sky, is it any wonder that he eventually becomes confused? As Hawthorne says, "No man, for any considerable period, can wear one face to himself, and another to the multitude, without finally getting bewildered as to which may be the true". There is some hope for Dr. Jekyll and some hope for Mr. Hyde, if only they are two separate individuals; but the combination in one personage who can bear? Master minds paint no character blacker than the hypocrite's. Listen to Tennyson, for example:

> "With all his conscience and one eye askew,
> So false, he partly took himself for true;

Whose pious talk, when most his heart was dry,
Made wet the crafty crow's-foot round his eye;
Who never naming God except for gain,
So never took that useful name in vain;
Made Him his cat's-paw and the Cross his tool,
And Christ the bait to trap his dupe and fool;
Nor deeds of gift, but gifts of grace, he forged,
And, snake-like, slimed his victim ere he gorged;
And oft at Bible-meetings, o'er the rest
Arising, did his holy, oily best".

But there is one thing more about the hypocrite that challenges attention. He keeps himself apparently within a circle where delicacy and good form prevent his associates from warning him. Why did the Wise Virgins not admonish the Foolish, and advise them sooner? The answer is self-evident—the Foolish would have resented it. They would have protested that they were better and more exemplary than the Wise. It is presumption to exhort a hypocrite to live a worthy life. He would stare you out of countenance. "You!" he would say, "you! exhorting me!" Think of admonishing a Pharisee to whiten up his life! Think of walking up to a hypocrite who calls himself a Christian, and asking him to accept Christ as his Saviour! You would be put out of the Church! Your conduct would be regarded as preposterous. Jesus is the only man since the world began who could look a Pharisee calmly in the eye, and say, "Woe unto you, you hypocrite"; but since He is no longer in the flesh, the hypocrite's house seems to be left unto him desolate. His attitude puts him beyond the pale of friendly, helpful, Christian admonition.

It is at this point that the epithet with which the letter opens begins to reveal its force and appropriateness. It seems to distil its meaning like drops of dew on every sentence. It is needless to go very far afield to find the import of that word "Amen". From times immemorial it is a word that has stood as a monument to mark the close of a prayer. It signifies simply that the petitioner is candid, that he has allowed no double meanings to slip into his supplications, that he has wrestled at a throne of grace with integrity of heart and mind and purpose; in short, that everything to which he has given utterance has proceeded from "love sincere" and "thoughts immaculate". It is as though the suppliant were to say, "I know that thou, God, seest me; I know that there is no creature that is not manifest in thy sight, and that all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom I am dealing; I know that anything like subterfuge would be useless, and would incur thine instant and infinite displeasure; what I am asking I am asking in good faith, and in closing I am willing to put myself under oath, as I hereby do, that by my singleness of heart in making these requests I am ready to stand or fall in the Judgment of the Great Day". When Christ announces Himself as the "Amen", therefore, He announces Himself as the One in whom no semblance of hypocrisy, or anything of such a character, is conceivable. He goes up again, as it were, "into a mountain to pray"; and as He prays, the fashion of His countenance is altered; His raiment becomes white and glistering, as white as the light; He is transfigured; His innermost holiness becomes translucent, and His companions see with their own eyes

that there is "no unrighteousness in Him". When Christ calls Himself the "Amen", therefore, it is as if He had said that He was qualified and in position to judge all hypocrites, such as these Laodiceans were, consistently. These things saith He who is transparently sincere.

Equally applicable to the situation and occasion, however, is the second member of the statement. It is not pleasant to take the witness-stand when one knows that one's testimony will seal the doom of the defendant. But Jesus Christ, when He takes the stand, will be influenced by nothing but the simple truth. If, as a matter of fact, men are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, if their condition is such that the only thing left for Him to do is to 'spew them out of His mouth', we may be sure that "the Faithful and True Witness" will not swerve by a hair's breadth from these realities in giving His testimony. In fact, the very letter that lies before us supplies us with irrefutable evidence to this effect. All the wealth and superior advantages of the Church of Laodicea were of no avail to stop the Son of man, or modify a single syllable, when the hour came to declare the truth. The condition of the Church was altogether unpraiseworthy in every respect, and the testimony harmonizes point for point with the facts. It is enough to blanch the cheek and make the heart stand still. These things saith the "Faithful and True Witness".

Were the Laodiceans so wicked, then, that they were without hope? Blessed be God, it is of the very genius of the Christian religion that no man is left utterly without hope while life lasts. What the Laodiceans needed was

the new birth. The message of this letter to them may be summed up in Christ's words to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again". Accordingly Christ announces Himself to them as the "Beginning of the Creation of God". They would have to become "new creatures in Christ". The new life in us begins with Christ; He is the Creator of it. The Laodiceans, though they had plumed themselves on their superior brand of Christianity, and had persuaded themselves that they had "need of nothing", would have to acknowledge their insincerities and come back to Christ who alone could begin God's new creation in their hearts. "I counsel thee to buy of me", says Christ; there was no other from whom they could buy; they would have to go to the source. If they would start anew, and begin at the beginning, however, the true riches was still within their reach, the raiment of the Redeemer's righteousness was still ready for their adornment, and the gift of seeing things as they are was still at hand to be freely offered them as soon as they were willing to confess that they were blind.

The epithet fits the letter. He whose sincerity it would be blasphemy to question stands above and looks down upon a Church whose hypocrisy is complete. He whose testimony as a witness has never known a variation or shadow of turning from the truth calmly informs the Laodiceans that their condition in the sight of God is such as puts them on a parity with the self-righteous Pharisees, the Sons of Sceva, and the Rich man who lifted up his eyes in hell, "being in torments". And He apart from whom no divine creation can be begun in the soul counsels the Church of Laodicea to come to Him, while the market still stands

open, and buy, without money and without price, the only commodities that can save them from their sins.

Thus we come to Laodicea's "contract". What was it? How could Christ hold the Church of Laodicea aloft in His right hand as a light to lighten the world? Its very depravity furnishes us with the answer. "Behold I stand at the door and knock", says Christ. Is it not a thought inexpressible and full of glory that no Church can become so corrupt, or so hollow and insincere, but that Christ, while it continues to exist, still stands at its gates, until "His head is wet with dew and His locks with the drops of the night", pleading with it to let Him in? Laodicea was chosen to exemplify the longsuffering of God. With Laodicea it was the same as of old. Ephraim, we are told, provoked Jehovah "to anger most bitterly". Things were so bad that Jehovah said, "Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit"; and yet in the same connection He says, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together". Until the last moment of life on earth the Father's pleading cry to fallen men has always been, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" This picture of Christ standing at the door of the Laodicean Church and patiently waiting to be admitted, after the door has been deliberately closed in His face, is, in its own way, the sublimest picture of the Bible. Its title we may take from Browning's *Saul*—"SEE THE CHRIST STAND!"—its meaning, from those immortal lines in *Karshish, the Arabian Physician*:

"The very God!—think, Abib; dost thou think?
So the All-Great were the All-loving too!
So through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying: 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power, nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee'."

"If any man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". And this—to an organization of insipid supercilious hypocrites! What manner of love the Christ exhibits!

The promise in this seventh letter is quite remarkable. It touches the zenith. And no wonder, for the obstacle which the victim of hypocrisy has to "overcome" is next to insurmountable. Why then should not the reward be in some degree commensurate? Think of the spiritual servitude and abject bondage of those Laodiceans. Wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked—and 'they knew it not'! Only normal when insincere! In the grasp of a hypocrisy so subtle that it "does not know itself to be hypocritical"! They have taken the last step downward short of perdition, and are the willing dupes of their own deceit. For such a man to open his heart and let Christ in would be like stepping from the pit to the throne. Not some time in eternity, but instantly he would feel the sovereignty of the Son of God tingling in his viens. From the very instant of his conversion every successive second of his life would be *crammed* with eternity. Christianity gives the Christian

the consciousness of supremacy. When "ye are Christ's", says Paul, "all things are yours". The universe is underneath your feet. Every minute is a millennium. You "live and reign" with Christ, are as it were on a par with Him, share with Him in His dominion over everything inimical to the welfare of the soul. Such a step was possible even for the lukewarm hypocrites of Laodicea, and if taken would receive an adequate reward; for the hardest task, once accomplished, awakens in the doer, involuntarily and of necessity, a certain sense of invincibility—feeling which he has nothing left him but to cry: "O Christ,

> Thou mine of bounty, how would'st thou have paid
> My better service, when my turpitude
> Thou dost so crown with gold!"

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